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# GOMEZ THE SHAME OF AMERICA

Fragments from the Memoirs of a  
Citizen of the Republic of Venezuela  
in the days of Her Decadence

by

JOSEF RAFAEL POCATERRA



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ANDRÉ DELPEUCH, ÉDITEUR  
51, rue de Babylone  
PARIS

1929

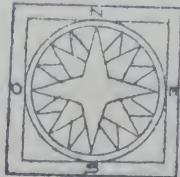
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INSTITUTO DE  
INVESTIGACIONES  
HISTÓRICAS

## EDITOR'S FOREWORD

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*Jose Rafael Pocaterra is undoubtedly one of the most remarkable of contemporary South-American writers. Gifted as a newspaper man he is also a fiery and formidable pamphleteer, while his admirable short stories have won him numerous admirers and his novels are considered among the finest ever written by a Venezuelan author. Indeed when one refers to him as a Venezuelan man of letters this title does not simply indicate the nationality of the author of Politica Feminista, Vidas Oscuras, Cuentos Grotcos, Tierra del Sol Amada, etc. ? but also, and chiefly, the man in whose writings one finds the most faithful, brilliant and striking picture of the life and atmosphere of Venezuela. With a realistic style that contains much lyric beauty as well as emotion Pocaterra captures and holds the attention of his readers. The force and intensity of his thought, no less than the vigor of his expressions, allow one to apply to him the same epithet that Ruben Dario used in describing Zola. « He's not a man, he's a bull. »*

*In 1907, when hardly eighteen years of age Pocaterra engaged in his first journalistic conflicts when he dared to combat the famous and sanguinary Cipriano Castro. Naturally in a very short time he found himself behind prison bars. After being confined in the citadel*

of Puerto Castello ha was later taken to the famous dungeons of the fortress of San Carlos. Castro, who had been obliged on account of ill-health to take a trip to Europe was betrayed by Juan Vincente Gomez, a sort of general utility-man to whom his master had turned over the presidency of the republic during his absence. Gomez, taking advantage of the situation, seized the executive powers for himself and declared Castro an outlaw and public danger. This action on the part of Gomez was not prompted in the least by a desire to do away with the despotic rule which Castro had established but on the contrary to intensify it. And he has done so ever since during a period which has now lasted for twenty years and which, stained with blood and crime, forms the darkest chapter not only in the history of Venezuela but also of the New World.

The fall of Castro having freed Pocaterra, he set about earning a living for himself and his family and at the same time building up his literary reputation. He had already become an outstanding figure among Venezuelan writers when, in 1913, indignant at the policy of Gomez, who already was almost openly intriguing to usurp complete authority for an indefinite period, Pocaterra joined the opposition party and participated in what is known as the Conspiracy of General Delgado-Chalbaud.

Since the readers for whom the lines are intended are probably unfamiliar with the details of Venezuelan history it might not out of place here to describe briefly the career of the most unfortunate victim of Gomez' savage despotism, the causes that fled up to his conspiracy and the reasons why it failed.

R. Delgado-Chalbaud, was a descendant of one of the most aristocratic families of Venezuela. Cultivated, and intelligent he had, while still a young man, won for himself an enviable position in political and military

*circles. He had naturally become a member of that patriotic group of men who sought to develop and increase the prosperity and well being, both moral and physical of their country. It was with this end in view that, in 1911, he hoped to obtain the help of France, in carrying out some of his plans. Delgado-Chalbaud was naturally attracted to France, the nation which he considered rightly as the great example of social civilization and political freedom and the land to whose Revolution Venezuela like so many other countries owed the dynamic impulse which had culminated in her own war of independence. Moreover Delgado-Chalbaud has French blood in his veins. His grand-parents on his mother's side were from Bordeaux and he loves and admires France and the French with that spontaneous enthusiasm which is natural to every true Latin.*

*As a means of carrying out his plans Delgado-Chalbaud proposed to establish in Venezuela, with French capital, a bank of issue and a bank for agricultural loans. These two enterprises would collaborate in a vast project for the general development of the country, a project which comprised many aspects. Among these was the colonisation of the federal district of the Amazon, a vast and fertile region with great forests and immense plains, through which deep rivers run and whose soil is rich in mineral and natural wealth, and the construction of a sewer system which would contribute to the hygiene of Caracas, the national capital.*

*Delgado-Chalbaud was sent by the government to France, with full plenipotentiary powers and the title of Fiscal Agent, to carry out the necessary negotiations. During his stay in Paris he managed to interest powerful capitalists and important businessmen in his plans. Acting strictly within the limits of the authority conferred on him by his government and having consulted the authorities in Venezuela he signed a contract for the*

establishment of the banking firms outlined above. But on his return home Delgado-Chalbaud was amazed to find President Gomez repudiating flatly the agreements which had been arrived at and instructing him to undo all that he had so laboriously accomplished. Delgado-Chalbaud was obliged to obey these orders although in doing so he made himself look ridiculous.

What were the reasons which had prompted President Gomez to issue such orders ? They are, alas, only too apparent. Already Gomez was planning to remain in office, although to do so would contrary to the Constitution and would involve the use of violence. Those bankers and capitalists in Venezuela who felt their interests endangered by the new enterprise took advantage of his criminal ambition and suggested that the creation of such establishments, or in other words the introduction of French capital into the national finances would threaten the success of the President's schemes.

In addition to this we have also the pro-German sympathies of Gomez which were already very apparent and expressed themselves by his servile and grotesque imitations of William II in his uniforms, speeches and telegrams. This attitude, which was to become still more clear during the Great War, was exploited by the German Minister at Caracas, von Prolius, and by the principal German business houses of which the firm Blohm was the most prominent.

After having waited for several months to see what turn events would take Delgado-Chalbaud attempted in May 1912 to leave the country. But as at the time he was at the head of a shipping enterprise, the Companie Fluviale et Cotière de Venezuela, which he had founded and which had become very successful thanks to his executive ability, he was obliged to ask permission from the authorities before going abroad. President Gomez refused to consider his request, saying that it was necessary

for Delgado-Chalbaud to remain at his post and help him in his political manœuvres. This fact is proved by documents in possession of the person concerned.

In connection with this matter General Delgado-Chalbaud had a private interview with the President. During their conversation the General, speaking of the alarm with which many citizens regarded the pending presidential succession, had the courage and frankness to ask the President what he thought of the matter. At the same time Delgado-Chalbaud expressed his conviction that any attempt to « continue » the existing administration, in other words to re-elect Gomez, would have unfortunate results and would probably provoke a civil war, since by its illegal character it would justify an armed rebellion. Statements such as those made on this occasion by Delgado-Chalbaud were all the more serious as they were uttered at the very time when Cipriano Castro, the former chief, or more exactly the master, of Gomez, whose confidence the latter had basely betrayed, was known to be taking steps to regain his lost power.

The cynicism with which Juan Vicente Gomez replied to Delgado-Chalbaud was revolting and yet instructive. All the man's insatiable greed, his instinctive treachery, his brutal and calculating cruelty were expressed in a way which deserves to be quoted textually. Unfortunately it is impossible to render the full grossness of his remarks, a grossness which is characteristic since the vocabulary employed by Gomez is that of a common, illiterate laborer. Every word he says betrays the lack of refinement, the boorishness of mind, the inherent commonness and vulgarity of the man which are already apparent in his gestures and manner.

« No I'm not trying to put over any of this succession stuff, You're right, it would be too good an excuse to start a revolution. It would be just what Don Cipriano is looking for as a reason for coming here and trying to

« gum up » our game. I know Don Cipriano. I know him well. I know what it would mean if he should start things and want to break up our « God-given peace ». I'm laying off of this succession business. But you know that Congress is backing me and that Congress will elect anybody I tell'em to. So that's as it should be. It isn't worth worrying about it anyhow till election day comes round. The great thing is for things to be quiet, for nobody to go shooting off their mouth about politics or candidates and to keep the newspapers from printing any fool yarns about the whole business. When election day's here I'll come out and say who's my man. That day I'll call Pete over and say to him « Here Pete, my lad, toddle over to Congress and give, 'em this piece of paper. It's an order to nominate and elect you as President ». Pete will probably start to do as he's told. But perhaps I'll see an expression in his eye that don't please me. If that happens I'll call Jack and tell him. « Here you, beat it over to Congress and tell 'em that Pete is not my man, but that you are the boy they're to elect. » Naturally you can understand why I want things to be kept quiet till I'm all ready to shoot. »

While saying all this to Delgado-Chalbaud Gomez adopted the sly, insinuating tone he uses so often, obviously he hoped to flatter the General and make him believe that perhaps he, Delgado-Chalbaud, might be either Pete or Jack. A few months later Gomez carried out his program with Gil Fortoul who, up to the last moment, believed that he would be President. However Gomez must have noticed something he disliked about Fortoul for he had Marquez Bustillos elected instead.

No Venezuelan with the least interest in his country's welfare could have heard such a cynical statement without becoming indignant and Delgado-Chalbaud was certainly the last man to accept it quiescently. He was a man of action, an idealist, filled with youthful energies

and enthusiasms. At once he set about organizing the resources at his disposal and those of his friends to foil the tyrant's plans. He informed the leading men of the community what schemes the president was setting afoot. Later he enlisted the aid of persons who, although forming part of the existing administration, were not prepared to become the accomplices of Gomez in his program of ruthless usurpation of authority. General Jose Ignacio Pulido, Leopoldo Baptista, Juan Pablo Penlosa, J. M. Ortega Martinez, Gregorio, S. Riera, Nicolas Rolando, F.-L. Alcantara and many other prominent men in public life, representing all shades of political opinion, with whom he conferred at length all promised their support in an open opposition to Gomez' nefarious design. Should the latter not employ the legal forms of electoral plebiscite which would enable the nation without constraint to choose its representatives, it was agreed that, at the moment when he attempted to carry out his coup d'état, he should be arrested and tried according to proper judicial procedure.

Jose Ignacio Pulido, President of the Government Council, an honorable old man, set a day for the elections in accordance with the law and guaranteed that the liberty of vote would be respected to the fullest extent. But among these men there was a traitor. It is meet and right that his name should be recorded in these pages. It was Nicolas Rolando who informed the President of what was going on. Gomez began his counter-offensive by attacking the members of the National Council. By every means in his power he sought to prevent the Council from holding its meetings at which it was to nominate its officers. At the same time he had one of his henchmen, Dr Arcaya, the Attorney-General, indict the National Council for undue exercise of authority and irregularities of procedure. This was the first step on the path of usurpation.

*The council was dissolved and replaced by men in the pay of Gomez. He had the police guard his sacred person in an obvious manner while the legal members of the council were obliged to flee the country in terror of their lives.*

*Delgado-Chalbaud, meanwhile, with many of his friends and political associates had been shut up in the notorious prison of La Rotonde at Caracas. There all these unfortunate men had irons weighing more than seventy five pounds attached to their feet. They were deprived of blankets, linen, and in short of everything that could make existence in the least endurable. Delgado-Chalbaud was obliged to be present while his friends were tortured in the vilest conceivable manner — including a frightful method involving the twisting of their testicles — in order to wring from their lips the confession that he, Delgado-Chalbaud, had taken part in a fantastic and wholly imaginary plot to assassinate President Gomez. As he persisted in denying this and as his companions, even under torture, refused to make any such statements President Gomez gave orders that he was to be deprived of food and drink and placed in solitary confinement. Under these conditions he was forced to sign orders giving Gomez large sums of money. These sums, amounting to more than a million francs were paid over by the wife of Delgado-Chalbaud to the Governor of Caracas, Juan C. Gomez, the brother of the President. At the same time the shipping company which Delgado-Chalbaud had formed, and of which he was the head, was forced to liquidate, thus causing him to lose stock valued at two million more francs which were taken over by President Gomez who now conducts the enterprise with the other members of his family.*

*The imprisonment of Delgado-Chalbaud took place without the slightest form of judicial trial and in violation of all constitutional guarantees. He remained for*

postponed grants should be as follows: will, attorney for trustee and without written confirmation of grantee, and the right to communicate with his wife, his widow, his mother or any of his friends. Legatees have the last and sole discretion to give all the funds. There is no provision, nor the right of financial and restriction of the financial control of legatees. However, by lawyer and attorney. There being three. May I have a copy of the will, either at least the one of the two which has not to be sent the attorney immediately. Today is Friday, Paris and it is late. And this time, no government and congressional shall be the stars of the show, either. I am

President has to find some money in the  
affair but has not succeeded in so far as he is  
now poor and cannot sell much here and has  
difficulty getting the material necessary to build houses.  
They are numerous here and have been ruined and  
abandoned so that we can only wonder what the  
wants for their shelter and subsistence.

President, along with many other of his friends  
believed it better to the Company of Quebec-Que-  
bec to make sufficient money to always stand in the  
position to be able to continue to be influential. Con-  
sequently he was able to remain in the country. This  
concerning with his patriotic duty, is evident from  
the course of his life and in numerous instances of  
unselfish service to his state and to the welfare  
of the agricultural people of Quebec. He could not  
do so much value to the following cause, in the  
friendly support which he gave to the Patriotes  
the Battle of Lacolle. When the war was  
first opened and when the war God in Canada  
Quebec is the residence and where in the middle  
middle position for Canada. There through the  
years and years he has been the center of the  
patriotic activities throughout the Quebec-Quebec

*fourteen years shut up in a filthy cell, always in irons and without medical attentions of any sort, nor the right to communicate with his wife, his children, his mother or any of his friends. Lying there in that hell-hole Delgado-Chalbaud spent all his youth. There he watched perish, one by one, a hundred and seventeen of his friends, carried off by torture, by poison, by hunger and by disease. There he lay from May 17, 1913 to March 24, 1927, when at last he was set free on condition that he was to leave the country immediately. Today he lives in Paris and it is here that this man, so determined and courageous told us the story of his long, pitiful Calvary.*

*People who have no first hand knowledge of the reign of terror that has held Venezuela in an iron vice for so many years, and which still exists there, will find it difficult to believe the incidents recorded in this volume. They seem incredible, but it is to make these crimes and a thousand similar and even worse ones known that this work has been written and published.*

*Pocaterra, along with many others of those involved in what is known as the « Conspiracy of Delgado-Chalbaud », was fortunate enough to escape arrest, as his share in the plot was unknown to the authorities. Consequently he was able to remain in the country. While continuing, with characteristic energy, to earn his living by means of his pen and in commercial enterprises he remained faithful to his ideals and an irreconcilable enemy of the tyrannic rule of Gomez. The result was that, as he himself relates in the following pages, he too was finally imprisoned behind the bars of La Rotonde, the Bastille of Caracas. Liberated four years later he fled abroad and since then has lived in Canada where, thanks to his intelligence and ability, he has made a notable position for himself. There through the newspapers and through his books, he carries on his campaign, scattering throughout the Spanish-American*

countries his fiery indictment of the tyranny which grinds his country beneath its wheels.

Among Pocaterra's political writings, wherein are pilloried in unforgettable prose the sins of the Gomez regime, the volumes entitled « *The Memoirs of a Venezuelan in the days of the Decadence of the Republic* » hold a prominent place. Three volume have already been published and two more are still to appear. It is extracts from this work which form the present book, issued in order that Anglo-Saxons may have an opportunity of knowing the true facts of what is going on in Venezuela.

Meanwhile the government of Gomez has sought by means of an active propaganda, financed with gold which it draws from the national treasury, now become the private property of the despot, to create abroad the impression that Juan Vicente Gomez, thanks to his energy, public spirit and activity has brought about an era of peace, prosperity and well being throughout the land over whose destinies he presides in a patriarchal fashion. According to the same publications Gomez is the unquestioned leader of his people who adore him for the benevolence of his character as well as for the public benefits which they enjoy thanks to his enlightened and beneficent rule. As proof of the truth of their statements the officials chroniclers of the President's activities point to the fact that for the last twenty years he has continued to hold practically dictatorial power over the administration of the Republic. What a feeble argument this is ! According to such reasoning a crime that lasts long enough justifies itself and becomes an act of virtue. But the reasons why Gomez has managed to maintain his authority are different from those which his apologists give. Gomez came into office following the reign of Castro, who possessed real military skill, had, in the course of six successive and sanguinary uprisings, broken the belligerant and combative ardor of the nation.

*Death, exile or prison had one by one eliminated those men of action who might have combated the rule of the executioner of the Venezuelan race. The bones of more than two thousand victim are today scattered over the national roads and the private estates of Gomez who, reviving the traditions of ancient Rome drafts forcibly the children of the poor from the cities and countrysides to toil without pay on the famous lines of communication which it is true he has built, but which are watered with the blood and tears of a nation of slaves. Twenty thousand Venezuelans, unwilling to accept the draconian rule of this twentieth century Nero, are eating the bitter bread of exile far from the land where they were born. For twenty years the population, oppressed by constant spoilations and ruthlessly exploited by merciless tax collectors, have been slowly dying of hunger and exhaustion. Famine stalks the land. Meanwhile the natural riches which the country possesses have been appropriated by Gomez and his partisans in whose hands they have become a means of corruption which completes the work of national degradation. And, forming the final paragraph of the dreadful document that relates the downfall of a people we have the discovery of the oil fields. These under other circumstances would have been a great, limitless source of a national wealth. Today these wells, the abundance of whose output has placed Venezuela third among the oil producing countries of the world, form the most dangerous and most useful weapons which the tyrants wields because the wealth they bring in, and which should be spent for the benefit of the nation as a whole, he has appropriated to further his personal ends.*

*A year ago, in 1927, it seemed as though the reign of terror which Gomez had inaugurated was about to decline. At that time the elections were drawing near which were to replace one puppet by another at the head*

of the nation's executive department, or else purely and simply re-elect the despot and confer on him once again the title of President. Gomez selected this moment to free the prisoners confined for political offenses, who for periods of as much as sixteen years had been wasting away behind the bars of prisons into which they have been thrown without even the shadow of legal trial. But in Venezuela no one was deceived by this apparent act of clemency. For one thing people know the character of Gomez too well to be taking in by any such comedy and besides, everyone was sure that, although they might go about their business in apparent security, they were, in fact if not in name the prisoners of the tyrant. Doubtless in a few months Gomez, using some of the methods which he had employed so often before, would revert to his former habits and even intensify his repressive policy. And this is exactly what took place.

Using as pretext the recent mass meeting held by the students of the University of Caracas, at which the Marseillaise was sung, as a sign of their revolt against the despot's rule, a number of citizens were killed by a volley of rapid-fire guns trained on the crowd. The meeting organized by the women of the city to protest against the abominable butchery was broken up in the same way. In this case the excuse put forward by Gomez would have been laughable had it not resulted in such tragic consequences for it was nothing less than that a perfectly legal meeting of the students was a gathering of a particularly dangerous group of Bolchevists, consequently a menace to civilized society. Needless to say bolchevism in Venezuela at the present time is totally inexistant and is likely to continue so, unless hatred of Gomez and his faction drive the rest of the population to embrace any form of political creed that seems to promise a riddance of such vermin.

How does it happen that during this long period of



Jose-Raphael Pocaterra, author of *«Memoirs of a Citizen of Venezuela»* for three years a prisoner in the dungeons of Gomez where he wrote *«The Sun of America»*.



General Juan Vicente Gómez who as President of the Republic of Venezuela has unparalleled in the annals of America.

agony the Venezuelans have not had recourse to that desperate remedy — political assassination ? Simply because they recognized that it would be necessary not merely to do away with a single individual but with a whole organized regime. In 1922 Gomez when he was re-elected president took pains to have his brother Juan made first vice-president and his son Jose Vicente second vice-president. The latter like all of Gomez' children is a bastard for the gules sinister is the only heraldic emblem that such creatures are entitled to bear. Shortly afterwards the first vice-president was savagely assassinated while lying asleep in his bed-room, guarded by the bayonettes of the troops whose presence has converted the palace of Miraflores into an armed citadel. This family crime — for it is a notorious fact that the spirit of nepotism extends among the Gomez even as far as murder, secured for the nephew of dead man the position of first vice-president.

To assassinate Gomez means he would be replaced by his son and, should the latter disappear, his place would be taken by other members of the tribe, who one and all consider the nation as their property. No, the killing of the tyrant would be fruitless and sterile. Gomez remains in power by the force of arms, depending for his support on an army whose rank and file is recruited from the lees of an illiterate population, while the officers are accomplices and henchmen of the despot. Thus he and his dynasty must be overthrown by an armed revolution a national uprising. The tyrant must be dislodged while still alive in order that he may be brought to trial for his innumerable misdeeds. It is only the almost insurmountable difficulty connecting with the obtaining of weapons that has prevented the people of Venezuela from accomplishing this revolution. The day that the masses can rise, arms in hand, the rule of the tyrant will be at an end, and *Liberty, Justice, and Right*, those ideals for

which the nation struggled in the past and for which it has never ceased to yearn, will once more rule the land.

We will end this introduction by reproducing two broadsides which were circulated at Caracas at the time of the mass meetings of the students and which present their case in eloquent terms.

THE STUDENTS OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF VENEZUELA  
TO THEIR FELLOW STUDENTS  
THROUGHOUT AMERICA

Sunday, the twelfth of this month, marked the end of the celebration of Students' Week celebrated by the student members of the university of Venezuela. During this week several of our comrades delivered speeches in which they demonstrated to the people of Venezuela the ruin that the long tyranny from which we have suffered had brought upon our nation. These speeches were delivered in front of the statues of those heroes who consolidated the independence of America.

As a result of these demonstrations several of our comrades were thrown into prison without any form of trial and in violation of the most elementary principles of Right and Justice. At the same time the despot whose existence is a disgrace not only to Venezuela but to all Americans, for Venezuela was the cradle of freedom on the Spanish American continent and bore a heroic part in the struggles of its fellow Spanish colonies to obtain self-government, the tyrant marched his troops through the city and past the Central University. The soldiers had received orders on the slightest sign of disturbance to massacre all members of the university body and all citizens who might take their part. It would indeed have

*been a massacre since, we, like all the other inhabitants of Venezuela, are defenseless and without arms.*

*In the face of such threats, uttered by the shameful despot we, the members of the university, will adopt the attitude which it behoves us to take. Doubtless we will be offered up as willing victims to his bloodthirsty nature ut at least we hope our blood may arouse of indignation in the hearts of many Venezuelans who seem patiently to bear his yoke and we appeal to our fellow students, who share our ideals and aspirations, for their support and sympathy. We are convinced that no American will be deaf to our appeal. At the same time we request that this open letter be published in all the newspapers of America in the name of human dignity and honor.*

Caracas February 14 1926.

TO STUDENTS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD,  
TO THE WORKING CLASSES !

*The latest events which have taken place in contemporary history have proved that nations everywhere have common interests and that the ruin or prosperity of one will necessarily affect all other countries.*

*Every day the necessity of a closer union between different countries and the unification of the efforts to outlaw war and to overcome despotism becomes clearer and clearer.*

*The population of Venezuela, a nation which forms an integral part of free and hospital America, which offers a shelter and refuge to every member of the proletariat, is today a victim of a hideous assault upon the rights of man.*

*In connection with the Students' Week four young men dared to pronounce the words of Liberty and Justice. A few hours later they were arrested, placed in chains and buried alive in the cells of the fortress of Puerto Cabello.*

*The entire student body demanded the release of the prisoners. This was refused. Thereupon, acting with an admirable spirit of comradeship, the students, unarmed, proceeded to the prisons to share the sufferings of their fellows.*

*At the present moment there are between four hundred and four hundred and twenty seven colleges and high school students who are suffering the tortures of starvation in loathsome prison cells. Such an outrage has roused the entire population of Venezuela to an indignant protest.*

*The Military School joined the movement. Its members were arrested and tortured. The same thing happened to those of the Law School. The working classes declared a general strike. The unconstitutional government, which for the last twenty years has oppressed and coerced the nation, loosed on the city the convicts and common-law criminals, armed them, promised them booty and rewards, and with these forces attacked the unarmed citizens. Hundreds of the latter have been killed or wounded.*

*The defenceless nation can only stand by and watch helplessly these crimes being committed. It longs desperately for arms with which to defend its rights and to avenge its wrongs.*

*Students all over the world, intellectuals, laborers do not let a nation perish ! Pity us ! Help us ! Implore your governments to appoint committees of inquiry and investigation.*

*Oh Society of Nations, if you be something more than a myth, come to our rescue ! Send us a commission who*

*will verify our complaints and testify to the truth of our assertions.*

*Latin-Americans, Pan-Americans, have done with empty phrases and windy speeches ! Protect this nation which is suffering in the clutches of illiterate cut-throats.*

*Student Federation of Venezuela.*

*Workingmen's Federation.*

*Committee of the mothers and sisters of the  
victims.*

Caracas, February, 25, 1928.

# Memoirs of a Citizen of the Republic of Venezuela in the days of Her Decadence

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Let me not die without having emptied my quiver !  
Without having lanced, without having crushed under  
[foot, without having plunged in their own filth  
These executioners, who bespatter the laws with mud.

André CHENIER, *Iambes*.

Since the days Roasas <sup>1</sup> and Gaspar Francia <sup>2</sup>, not forgetting the melancholy graduata <sup>3</sup> of Guatemala, America has never witnessed such a scandalous episode as the recent history of Venezuela in which hypocrisy and dishonor have played their part. How long a martyrdom it has been for a land whose inhabitants were once champions of the cause of Freedom. Today, thanks to the criminal complicity and indifference of their brother countries, those free-men have been transformed into a mass of slaves and serfs, governed by the lash and the chain. Crushed beneath the weight of a bloody tyranny they now find themselves slipping ever lower towards their final doom, the annihilation of the last spark of their national consciousness and of pride of race.

- (1) The terrible dictator of the Argentine.
- (2) The ghastly tyrant of Paraguay.
- (3) The Dictator Estrada Cabrera.

Their redemption is not a task which should arouse only their fellow-country, those Venezuelans, who, harried and exiled, have carried their family idols and the traditions which form a nation's birth-right over-seas, who have sought asylum wherever human liberty and the cause of justice are honored and respected. No, it behoves the youth of all America, the young men of Cuba and of Uruguay, those from the Argentine and those from Colombia to take action. It is for *them* to see to it that the gangrene does not spread. It is they who must realize that the example set by Juan Vicente Gomez and his family, more rapacious and cruel even than their predecessors, must cease. For fifteen long years they have been immune, they have been recognized, flattered and honored by the representatives of civilized nations which enjoy civic liberty. For fifteen years we have witnessed the spectacle of the triumph of brutal stupidity, have enjoyed the privilege of being governed by an administration that depended on bayonettes, torture-chambers, prison cells and doses of arsenic to maintain its authority. Such a regime constitutes a public danger not only for its unfortunate victims but for all those who come in contact with it. Do you realize this? Do you who live in countries governed by so-called statesmen realize the menace such a state of things means to you?

Take the case of Bolivia, of Peru, of certain republics of Central America. Naturally they cannot be compared with Venezuela. No could the wildest imagination gather from their records materials for such a volume as this, which I have torn still bleeding from the entrails of my unfortunate country. Yet every crime that succeeds, every crime that goes unpunished throughout our continent

fosters a common poison plant that spreads its shadow over the whole land. To right these wrongs wherever they exist, to destroy that root, such should be the task of all American youths. They should be inspired to do this by a sense of what they owe to the spirit of their race. And in doing so they will at the same time be acting in self-defense.

It is evident that it is neither mad profiteers nor belligerent barbarians who can prepare the proper future for those Spanish speaking peoples who inhabit the Southern hemisphere. The hope of our world lies in the hands of our young men. Only through them can we emerge into the light. Only they have the power to save us, to redeem the nations whose sons they are.

But let them be on their guard. The foe is powerful. He recognizes your strength. That is why he seeks to undermine it. To win you with facile favors rather than engage in a brutal struggle which would be more in accordance with his natural instincts. At times when you take up arms in open rebellion he throws off the mask. Remember the shootings at La Palma <sup>1</sup> and how poison was used at La Rotonde <sup>2</sup>. Do not forget how the mercenaries charged at Lima <sup>3</sup>, the wholesale banishments, the cold-blooded executions on the heights of Cajamarca <sup>4</sup> and how those who fought in the cause of Liberty were knived in the back on the plains of Casanare <sup>5</sup>.

In your ranks the working-man will take his place beside the student. Their union will be indivi-

(1) Gomez' country estate.

(2) The gloomy prison for political prisoners at Caracas.

(3) The capital of Peru.

(4) A city in Peru.

(5) A district of Colombia.

sible for their ideals are the same. The student is not a member of the so-called « *inteligencia* », he does not belong to those parasites clinging to the protective shell of the powers that be. His mission is a nobler one. In his hands he bears the torch that lights the path of civic honor. In the union of the student and the working-man we have an irresistible force that overthrows and pulverises all obstacles that impede its progress. This is as true in my country as it is elsewhere. So too one finds in Venezuela the corrupt administration seeking to disintegrate the Holy Alliance. But all it can do is win over the weaker brethren, attract those who, in order to satisfy natural appetites or personal ambitions, become the enemies of their former comrades-in-arms. It is with such converts that the iron-handed dictators seek to pass themselves off as friends of progress, order and normalcy.

The policy of those who smooth the path of the tyrant, who aid in the establishment of sinister despots is always the same. They sing the siren's song. Heed them not ! Do you know what it will cost you to follow their lure, to take the bait they hold out to you ? The price you will pay is a terrible one. You will see your enthusiasm exploited to serve base designs, your pure dreams soiled in the brothels where they hatch the plots by which they seek to enslave the freemen of America. What consolation is it to dance for a moment in the sun-light of public applause if one must pay for it by a life-time of slavery. The value of such satisfactions as one may obtain under these circumstances is less than that of a bank-note tossed to a prostitute who sells herself in order to have bread. I know it for I have listened to the confessions of those who fell into the trap, who allowed themselves to be duped.

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So often have I heard their lamentable stories that my disgust has been changed to a bitter, poignant pity.

But violence in itself offers no relief. Salvation cannot be won by obeying the spirit of destruction. Neither the torch that fires cities, nor the rope stretched from a lamp-post will serve our purpose. These means are those which silly fools recommend or which are employed by cowardly advisors. Violence never laid the foundation stone of any edifice. But we must not confuse violence with energy. Those who employ violence stop at nothing. They are prepared to repudiate their friends as violently as they have fought for them. Violence is extravagant. It looses its balance. Its adherents foam with rage at the sight of a foe's face on paper but do not move a finger in useful service. I insist it is not violence which should guide us and be our inspiration but the spirit of justice. Justice, hard and implacable, cold and pitiless, devoid of hatred, devoid of bitterness-above all devoid of fear.

If these pages, which I have solemnly dedicated to the social rebirth of Spanish-America, with all the horrible details they contain serve to awaken an echo in the breast of the younger generation then my task will have been successful. Then I will be able to die in peace.

It may well be that the example of what has happened in Venezuela is encouraging the ambitions of some other despotic powers at the present time. I accuse no one. I have not shut myself up within the narrow limits of a carefully determined position. I am not one of those apostles whose mission is confined to any one group. The tyrants of Lima are as loathsome to me as those of Caracas, those of Bolivia or those of Central America. I am not prepared

to make any concessions to the enemy, to recognize any truce merely because he happens to be the other side of the frontier. My foes are not the Gomez of Venezuela but all the Gomez of Spanish and native America.

If I had looked for the support or the encouragement of my compatriots I should long ago given up the fight. The majority of them display all the characteristics of a decadent race. They are afflicted with a spirit of petty intrigue, they are inclined to be lazy, they lack will-power and suffer, on the other hand, from an exaggerated fondness for sterile discussion and a romantic affection for action which finds expression in words rather than in deeds. If they only knew how disappointed I had been as I watched them strut about in the lime-light, waving shabby togas and mouthing heroic phrases with lips still stained by servile slobbering at the feet of those in power.

It is not to them that I address myself, but to you, youths of twenty, force of the future, source of all virtues and all hopes, you who can purify and redeem our land. Please God when the writer of these pages shall have become a handful of dust beneath the sod of some foreign land may these pages teach you a lesson. May they still live in your memory, not in order call down anathema upon the memory of the culprits or their accomplices, for their names will long before have been forgotten, but as evidence that a generation of men who make no protest against tyranny deserve their fate, deserve exile, death, the triumph of evil and that shameful veil of darkness which enshrouds twenty year's of our nation's history.

Jose Rafael POCATERRA.

Montreal, Canada, 1916.

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE SPANISH EDITION

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I spent long years in exile before completing this book. Today its publication has become not only necessary but imperative. Therefore I break my silence. If I have not done so before, if I allowed much time to elapse since the day when I left my prison cell, it is because I wished to let the molten mass of my memories of what I had witnessed cool, to pour them deliberately into a measured mold, undisturbed by any too violent agitation.

Those who expect to find in this volume violent personal attacks or the ranting of a political demagogue will be disappointed. Those who expect that it will prove a conventional whitewashing of the actions of those in power may likewise leave it unread. I address my remarks neither to partisans nor to cold-blooded, cynical by-standers.

What I am writing is History. My cause is that of Justice. I plead in the name of liberty. What poor lawyer I would prove if I falsified the former, tried to mislead Justice and attempted to make Liberty serve my personal ends... Thus it is quite likely that I will speak less severely of those beings who are the vilest of all, than of shortcomings of those whose actions have left me entirely cold, or

those others who, in spite of all that has taken place, I still admire and, sometimes, even love. The task I have undertaken is a form of expiation. I insist that I must bear witness to the extent to which I have been betrayed. That task weighs heavily upon me, heavier even than the ball and chain of the convicted criminal, for in this collapse of all human ideals which I am about to record the guilty and the accused are welded into one chain whose links are inseparable.

Much of what I am about to relate I saw with my own eyes, I took part in many of the episodes I am writing about. My accounts of the rest are based on painstaking investigations carried out over a period of seventeen years and rigorously checked and controlled. They possess the weight and value of testimony uttered by reliable, first-hand witnesses some of whom speak with the awful majesty of those whose message comes to us from beyond the grave.

It is these voices that have echoed commandingly in my heart, that have never ceased to urge me on, that have never been silenced by the hundred and one disturbances which assail every exile. I have fixed their message here as a permanent record for all eternity. Like the needle which vibrates as it glides over the wax disk so my pen has traced the spirals which form this record, this record from which rises, beating insistently upon indifferent or hostile ears, a cry of anguish, a cry in the darkness, a cry that is the voice of my lost youth.

I am the last survivor of a generation that has been wiped out. My words are addressed to those who come after me. It is for them I have labored, that I have suffered, in order that by my labor, by my suffering they may become free, that they may

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go forward along the path of Freedom with clean hands and with the star of Hope on their brows. In performing my task I have obeyed *the voice of the dead*.

I write these lines on a night in May thousands of miles away from my native land, far from the plots of those who wish me ill, even from the loving care of those who are dear to me and from whom space and time, and in some cases death, have separated me. Here in this Northern clime I sit alone by my lamp while without the rain beats on the pane as the final blast of winter's storms batter against the frail barrier. It is amid such surroundings that I write the last lines of my book where are mirrored from day to day, from hour to hour, the recollections of a citizen of Venezuela in the days of her decadence. As I look at the pages of my manuscript I realize that I have carried out the instructions I received, that the orders of the dead have been obeyed

The hour which I long looked forward to is at last at hand. At last I have attained that summit towards which I toiled so long. At last I have fulfilled the oath I swore on the bloody corpses of the despot's victims.

I look back along the path I have travelled. Without hate, without favor, without prejudice, as I have accomplished my other daily tasks, so I read what I have written. I regret nothing. I have built my edifice up patiently, phrase by phrase, letter by letter. The foundations are solid, for they stand on those unshakable cornerstones, sincerity, self-abnegation, justice and independence.

These lines were not written to touch the hearts of brute breasts nor to arouse the sympathies of hardened criminals. I know only too well « the tenderness of the panther or the magnanimity of the

grizzly. » Nor will I attempt to argue with that band of wretched individuals who support the rule of despots. I know by heart in advance what arguments they will use, these cynical rascals who extract bits of outworn dogma from libraries, as they would pull out worms from rotten wood ; the dead-wood of forgotten philosophies. Do they use these means to strengthen their cause ? Not a bit of it, only as something by which they may keep themselves from starving. For those who serve rapacious monsters must eat also. Only they are inclined to forget that it is they who will be devoured in the long run.

No one will ever know what is cost me to pursue my task, to give up all those things that made life pleasant, to abandon the pursuit of knowledge, communion with nature, the joys that art has to offer, the riches of literature and to transform myself into an inquisitor, a policeman, yes even a ghoulish body-snatcher and a student of medecine in its legal aspect. But all this was necessary. My fate demanded that I should appear and plead my cause before a Judge, from whom sentence there is no appeal. That Judge who has his seat in the human soul, whose code of laws is that of the Truth, whose verdict is uttered in these pages.

Who invested this judge with his awful power ?

It was not I, it was not any human being, he received his mandate from God Himself.

And it was He too who delivered me time after time from the lurking assasin, who saved me from madness, from death, from riun. It was he who saved me from hunger, from poison, from the horrors of the prison cell and the torturing chains of the gaoler. Why did He do this ? In order that I should tell the Truth, that I should write this book.

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Thus it has come about that the commands of the Dead have been fulfilled.

I can imagine how such solemn utterance will arouse the mirth of the silly, mocking writers of our decadent days. Let them laugh. I will give them much cause for merriment. If they read on to the end it is probable they will laugh themselves to death.

Our times are very clever. Every one is witty. The streets are full of half-baked disciples of Taine, of pseudo-Bergsons, parlor-positivists. All about us we see a carnival of cynical pleasure. Literature and art elbow sensational sport for the head-lines of the yellow journal, the woman's page flourishes in every printed sheet and grave events are pushed aside to make room for social inanities.

Our generation has been suckled on *eau de Cologne*, bread has become less necessary than *poudre de riz*. Philosophers perfume their theories as they would a courtisan. Literature has become a prostitute selling herself to the first comer, a matter of artifice and clap-trap whose purpose is to weaken the spirit of honor and morality, to banish patriotism. Authors stifle what disgust they feel and mouth windy nothings which they trick out with smiles and grimaces. In Venezuela, and in all other countries where no distinct local culture exists and where educational opportunities are limited, the so-called upper classes, which include the petty politicians, shop-keepers, scholars who commercialize their book-learning, journalistic dumb-bells, and timid social fops are one and all convinced that « things are the same everywhere », that « fine words butter parsnips » and that « the world is my oyster. »

Of course one finds such people elsewhere. But in more fortunate climes they are less pretentious, they

know when to keep their mouth shut, or if they open it only emit harmless platitudes such as form the essence of what is known as social small-talk or formulate such choice bits of wisdom as did the Homais of Flaubert. They « harm their country's cause abroad ». But not for a moment do they realize what the words « my country » means, and as for « abroad » have they ever heard a foreigner pass judgement on them ?

The elements which govern this section of public opinion are of various kinds. The fear of prison plays its part, so does the terror of being sent into exile, and then one has positive factors such a real fondness for slavery, laziness, a desire to find a hiding place for moral turpitude. What else do we find here ? Many unsavory things. The pages of corrupt newspapers, both domestic and foreign, filled with printed platitudes at so much per line, roads built with the blood and sweat of long-suffering convict laborers sentenced for political offenses, a deliberate effort to encourage spying, bribing and perjury in order to secure advancement in public service, statutes that are offense to the world's great and good men, the anniversaries of battles won by heroes and patriots celebrated by these yapping eunuchs who prate about the « glorious past » which they exploit. How appaling is the sight which meets our eyes on every side. See the banking system run by swindlers and thieves, the business situation according to statistics is in desperate straits, but according to newspaper reports it is prosperous and flourishing; agriculture is carried on under medieaval conditions, the landowners liable to be dispossessed or imprisoned while the laborers are little better than slaves. Everywhere is corruption, everywhere the exploitation of the masses by the few. All branches

of national activity, the fishing industry the pearl fisheries on the West coast, the shipping fleet, the salt marshes, the meat industry, even the most simple things such as the production of potatoes, eggs, coffee and cheese, the very virginity of the peasant children, all this is suckd up by the monstrous tentacles of that gigantic octopus which battens on the life-blood of the Republic.

Such forms of legal government as survive have become a complete farce. At the annual meetings of a body which calls itself the national Congress laws are passed that happen to suit the desires or demands of the capitalists, the only persons having any real authority. It is they who determine under what conditions the concessions of the deposits of *hydro-carbures* are to take place, how the question of ownership of uncultivated land shall be settled and determine the merits or demerits of certain laws. All these matters are changed or modified in accordance with the whims of the moment, they have fallen into the hands of speculators.

Those who carry out the orders of their masters are to be pitied as well as despised. They sell what they have, their intelligence such as it is, their energy, their knowledge, to a band of rapacious savages for a mess of potage. The slightest weakness on their part is pitilessly punished. What can be said of those who dominate them ? That they too obey their instincts, instincts of insatiable thirst for power which will, perhaps, in time become a useful factor in bringing about material prosperity for the country which at present they are only anxious to bleed to satisfy their own selfish ends. Be that as it may to-day they constitute a menace to society and as such deserve whatever punishment may be meted out to them. And it is they themselves who,

unconsciously, are forging the instruments by which they shall perish. The corruption which they have introduced into the body of the nation, it is they who are the first to suffer from its gangrene. The ease with which they attain their ends robs them of the vitality which alone makes life worth living for them. Enveloped in the poisonous emanations of the city these highway robbers will feel their strength seeping away little by little and become at length the abject victims of the state of things which they have brought about.

Whenever savages come into contact with a decadent form of civilization it is they that are decimated, not assimilated, by it. The savage's loin-cloth is apparent beneath the careful cut trousers of the dandy, the hand that seeks to manipulate the gatling gun has the gestures of the wild-man wielding a scalping knife.

The attempts of primitive beings to adapt themselves to an even vaguely civilized state of society results in incidents which are at times tragic at times burlesquely comic. This is what occurs in my country where one feels as though one was watching a mad farce.

The cast includes a stupid tyrant, some hangers-on at his court, who dip their fingers into the honey-pot of honors and easily made fortune and preside at banquets at which the fly specked cloth is covered with faded wreaths. Beside the hangers-on figure some quack doctors armed with those professional tools which they carry in Moliere's comedies and a swarm of professional or amateur *filles de joie*. Several clowns also have prominent parts and a half a dozen *partiquinos*<sup>1</sup>. In addition one has a

(1) A singer who plays very minor parts.

crowd of soldiers and peasants who gesticulate but do not speak. The time of the play is 1899-1920, the setting Venezuela. The play itself is divided into two distinct parts. The first act is melodramatic, violent and extravagant, the second is played in a minor key and has an artificial, cynical and hypocritical character. Scenes follow each other in rapid succession. Some are grave and tragic, others madly farcical, a few serious and beautiful. The evolution of certain personages is extraordinary, they reach a degree of self-degradation that is extraordinary. They walk on their heads, sticking out their bellies, and in such an attitude one cannot tell where they will finally end up.

Everyonetalks of « my country », « other countries ». Do you know what these words mean ? « My country » is a land which one cannot mention without feeling awkward in the presence of educated people belonging to civilized nations. You claim that one man does not make a nation but, you yourselves have declared that to you your country and a single man form an indivisible, all important unit.

And how about those « other countries »? The nations in which the governments and official newspapers are so much interested ? You do not understand them and they and their representatives despise you. What type of envoys do they send you ? M. Bowden with his parlor diplomacy, MacGoodwin and his « business deals », France with its talk of Jeanne d'Arc and its servile minister, Spain with its alleged member of the house of Bourbon who was noted as a tight-rope dancer ? Even from the neighboring colony of Curacao the only person who paid you an official call is a governor compromised in fraudulent speculation and who was never sober as long as he was in Venezuela. Such are the persons

from whom Gomez and his assistants have received honors and visits. In honor of such people costly official receptions were held, receptions for which the four « official representatives of the administration » ordered elaborate new uniforms in order to try and look like gentlemen, while the leas of the foreign colonies caroused and fraternized with drunken mulattos in the midst of triumphal arches made out of plaster to the blare of brass bands all playing discordantly.

What people most notice in the conduct of a nation or in that of an individual are those actions which are really distinguished or those which are very ridiculous. In the latter case interest is allied to cupidity since it is by taking advantage of the follies committed that the onlookers may profit the most. When I consider the effect produced abroad by Gomez opening an office in Washington having as its director a crafty Indian, named de Goro <sup>1</sup>, who did not know how to behave at table, I almost admire the methods of Cipriano Castro who literally kicked his ministers downstairs one day at La Guaira when they had displeased him.

We find an echo of the way in which foreigners look at Venezuela in the speech delivered by Elihu Root before the Constitutional Convention on July 30, 1915, when he declared satirically « I have been in public life for the past forty years. During that time the government of the State of New York has been as representative of public opinion as that of Venezuela. »

From the four points of the compass echoes the same question. « Are there no real men in Venezuela ? Do you produce only beings like Castro and Gomez. »

Such a question fills us with rage, shame and grief

but for twenty-five years we have not been able to answer it categorically.

The only reply that has been made was that uttered by Congress meeting in special session on June 2, 1921, at Carabova and declaring « Juan Vicente Gomez is the man necessary to us now and in the future » and going on to announce that the existence of the nation was practically synonymous with the preservation of that individual. So one can foresee already the day, not so very far off, when my poor Venezuela will perish, victim like its ruler of a congestion of the bladder.

When that day comes the cries which will be heard will not be the noble accents of a Greek chorus but the clamor of a mob of paid mourners baying at the moon.

What arms have we to combat this wave of mud, this rising tide of infamy that swallows up in its filthy depths the last vestiges of national honor or self-respect ? What forms the Opposition ? But is there any true Opposition where no one will undertake to combat existing evils seriously or efficaciously.

The men towards whom one may look to head such an opposition are in exile, or behind prison bars, or wandering about in the wilderness from one place to another. Some of them are sincere, some have adopted this attitude of opposition because they despise the tyrant, and some few because they seek thereby to redeem past errors. Among them are certain impulsive young men full of enthusiasm and energy but without any clearly defined program to guide their steps through the jungle growth of intrigue and subtle negotiations. There are also lawyers, grown old in the dusty atmosphere of the courts or legislative lobbies, seeking some politican

who will take them under his protection. Occasionally one finds some sharp fanged shark, a unprincipled demagogue followed by a group of satellites who hunt in troubled waters, or a creature that resembles an octopus stretching out tentacles in all directions. Such beings frequently possess by nature or instinct a morality which, like the imitative coloring of animals, allows them to take on the colors of their surroundings and resemble those around them as long as such an attitude proves useful. Or again we have men like those fishes who when attacked hide behind a cloud of inky matter, only in their case the ink comes off of well subsidized printing presses.

Is it surprising that in view of the varied but uniformly unprepossessing character of these various self-styled champions of liberty the people of Venezuela should adopt an attitude of suspicion and distrust, a combination which tends to paralyze activity of every kind ?

The ordinary citizen shrugs his shoulders, some whose profession is the well paid one of secret agent, whisper together. Do the whispers mean sympathy ? Not at all. It is merely a question of finding out who is backing the new comer or getting up a campaign to discredit in public opinion a man who does not share « their political ideas ». For amazing as it would seem such men have political ideas, colored of course to suit the master who pays the best. Invariably the reformer is defeated and in the end it is the public who feels that once more they have been betrayed and are less and less anxious to furnish a peseta, a man or a gun to the next « liberator ».

One of the characteristics of an Opposition made up of the elements described above is an inordinate love for publicity, a taste for proclamations, for pro-

tests and counter-protests. At times there rises from the stagnant depths some man really sincerely disgusted with what he sees about him. But he does not last long and afterwards the atmosphere becomes still heavier and more unbreathable. Meanwhile the various sections of the Opposition hate each other as much as they do their common enemy.

How can one expect that in the face of such conditions it would be possible to inspire the least sympathy abroad, to obtain a volunteer or to raise a dollar as a campaign fund when it is self-evident that it would be spent to satisfy some private ambition instead of for the public good. The groups live only to combat one another, to palaver eternally over points of doctrine and theory like the priests of decadent Byzantium, who sacrificed the authority of the episcopal see for the sake of settling quarrels between half-mad deacons or hysterical monks. What sensible person can be expected to respect a group of reformers who lack alike any logical program or clearly defined policy ?

I have attended many meetings held to discuss questions of public importance and have read innumerable pamphlets discussing such matters. Some of the pamphlets were sincere, others written merely to confuse and divide public opinion. In principle the reformers seemed to be of one mind. A program was mapped out, some attended the meetings, others wrote letters, invitations were sent out to possible sympathizers. And then it would all fall to pieces. Only a few members of the committee would attend the meetings, others asked to be excused and among the sympathizers we would be told « I cannot join the movement because I always keep out of politics », or there would be complaints because they had not been invited to become members of the committee.

In one instance I remembered being attacked at a meeting by a man who wanted to know how I dare think he would take part in such an enterprise.

Repeated defeats affected my health. My departure for New York prevented my being able to keep on the fight against our elusive but powerful foe. As I listened to my comrades ranting and raving it seemed to me as though they were voices muttering mad sentences in a dream, as though all that was going on round me was taking place in some Fourth Dimension of space and time. Some of my companions were men of noble aspirations and fine ideals but associated with them were others of doubtful reputation and antecedents, beings whose only motive for their actions was base, personal ambition and who seemed to take advantage of the dim twilight-hour at which we met to further strange, personal, morbid plans of their own.

To sum up the whole matter I consider that as long as the absolutist regime in Venezuela will have as Opposition only this feeble, farcial movement animated by a spirit of grotesque revolt and vain self-esteem our only hope will be the gradual wearing out of the dictator by his personal excesses and by the uric acid which is gradually seeping into every vein of his body.

We have seen an Opposition drunk on words and phrases. It is natural that it should be so. The symptoms of the decadent period are bound to make their appearance throughout a nation when blind chance and inherent feebleness on the part of the public has placed in the hands of one man and his satellites, those three all powerful elements of domination power, gold, and whips.

Thus the nepotism of Gomez, representing the triumph of brute force, is logical. We have too the

fact that the upper classes of the nation, with a few rare exemptions, are directly or indirectly interested in the continuance of the existing regime. More dangerous than the absurd doctrines preached by the professors who are paid by the government to justify its actions, more dangerous than the venal propaganda carried on by hired mercenaries in diplomatic, journalistic and military circles, are the financial elements involved in the concession of hydrocarbons. Here we have a vast potential source of national wealth but one which, in view of into whose hands it has fallen, has become a national catastrophe.

Little does it matter to the Venezuelans who are not professional politicians but who pride themselves on having business interests at stake what government is theoretically in office. All they care about is that favorable laws shall be drawn up and passed by a docile cabinet and that they may be able to form profitable connections with one of the men who controls financial operations on a large scale.

The whispered complaints that come from the provinces, the protests from overseas are received with sarcasm, disdain or insults. It is easy enough to stifle our conscience by accusing others of cowardice, incompetence and avariciousness in order to excuse the criminal negligence which we are displaying. Such are the methods employed by those at home and abroad who eagerly devour the scraps or tit-bits, as the case may be, that fall from the banquet table where is being held that Belshazzar's feast that has now been going on for twenty-five years.

I know my country inside and out. I have lived in almost every part of it. I have become acquainted with members of practically every class of society for I have studied them attentively for many, many

years. I understand them and I know the course of evolution through which every Venezuelan passes and that takes him now into the church, now into the brothel, into the laboratory, or into the penitentiary. In drawings rooms and military barracks, in saloons and schools I have studied my compatriots.

The total of all these observations has been the discovery of this hideous fact : this quarter of a century of absolute barbarism is the natural outcome of our short political existence.

Venezuela today is going through that valley of the shadow through which all other similar countries have passed. It is unbelievable that this will continue indefinitely. Yet an abnormal condition that lasts long enough comes to be normal. So long has this state of moral anarchy lasted that the Venezuelans have begun to look on it as natural, as logical. They have reached a point where they find excuses for their criminal conduct, criminal in that it has made them moral accomplices of the bloody tyrant who rules over them, criminal in its venality, criminal in its indifference. In order to justify themselves in their own eyes they accuse one another and blame each other for the defeats and humiliations for which they are all alike responsible.

If a new conspiracy were discovered, the same crimes would be committed, the same savage repressions would take place as those I have described in my volume « The Shame of America » written on the very spot where I witnessed them. These measures are pragmatically sound. They produce the desired result namely a state of terror which turns the population into a flock of timid sheep which evil shepherds lead in any direction they choose.

That foul growth is nothing more nor less than a disease which has its root in the pocketbook

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of the individual. Gomez is simply an exteriorisation of this disease but an exteriorisation which takes the form of a gigantic maleficent abscess. That abscess is one which drains the vital forces of the nation. Little by little the whole body politic and social has become infected, the brain, the muscles the heart all cease to function.

This is indeed a self-evident truth. All Venezuelans are revolutionists. At any rate they declare themselves hostile to the government now in office. But they only say this privately. Even here, on this side of the Atlantic, there are people who avoid us as they would lepers because we are outspoken and because, as a result, our fellow-countrymen look on us with suspicion. Others more intelligent adopt a sceptical attitude. They would like to see a revolution take place but in order to assist in bringing it about they insist it must be headed by « other leaders », must adopt « other policies ». Ah if only they could find such leaders, such policies, how enthusiastic they would be !

If one adopts this point of view there would never be a revolution anywhere for such leaders such policies as they demand do not exist. Only a handful remain. They are usually simple-minded souls who have never fought for or against anybody, or else they are gentlemen adventurers in the field of international politics or commerce.

A sign of the times is the special vocabulary that has come to be used at Caracas. Its terms are those employed in the brothel and the barrack-yard. It reminds one of slang invented by escaped convicts. Jail is « the cottage », prison « the big house », the citadel « the palace ». If you protest against the authorities you are liable « to have your toes stepped on » etc.

At intervals a new band of « reformers » makes its appearance. It possesses new subsidies, new flags, new catch-words, new methods. The result is always the same. The movement was only intended to « sell », as though they were a brand of cigarettes or toilet paper, some notoriety seeking climber whose ridiculous pretensions will simply still further confuse public opinion and discourage serious minded people. Few indeed of my fellow citizens will accept the long, slow, obscure drudgery by which alone a revolution can at last bear fruit. The news of each of these new ventures is received with shouts of laughter at Caracas.

And meanwhile... meanwhile hundreds of brave, resolute men lie rotting in filthy prison cells. Meanwhile we are once more showing the world the spectacle of our weakness and impotence.

Meanwhile among the masses hope turns first to anger, then to indifference. So many self appointed redeemers have appeared and redemption is still so far off. Some fine day Gomez will die or be assassinated. Another Gomez will take his place. Perhaps it will be the murderer of the Tachira or that big fool of Caracas. And we... we may come home. What else is there for us to do ? What are we doing abroad except fight among ourselves and weakening our cause by continuous and futile quarrels ?

To oppose Gomez, who is real, who exists, one must have something equally real, not merely illusions and dreams, or, worse still, lies born of selfish personal ambitions.

Thus we find ourselves face to face with the following situation. All factors at home and abroad militate against a *lasting* revolution. In Venezuela the masses would like to see a change in the form of government take place. But in Venezuela one

is not allowed to have a gun, a revolver or even a cartridge in one's possession. The law prohibiting the carrying of firearms has given Gomez the enviable position of having back of him six thousand armed men, all the national wealth, the moral, social commercial support of the upper classes who are either resigned or enslaved to his cause by the prospect of material wealth and prosperity, at the expense of the rest of the community. Opposed to him are silent, passive folk, a people that dares not call its soul its own, and through which flit police spies bringing every now and then the fatally true tidings.

« *They* are doing nothing. *They* can do nothing. *They* spend their times quarrelling and writing pamphlets... »

If Gomez were intelligent, if he were a real statesman, we would see the ranks of the opposition growing thinner day by day.

On the other hand, and this I have written in Venezuela itself, a generation is growing up which should make its presence felt, which should become conscious of its responsibilities, of the part it may be called upon to play. But it should assume those responsibilities simply, without striking attitudes or delivering empty speeches. It should step forward strong in its youth and confident of the righteousness of its cause. In short I say again one must set up in opposition to Gomez who symbolizes so many evil things an equally real and living symbol.

## CHAPTER XVI

The second coup d'état. — A little war before the Great War. — A new series of crimes. — The executioner of Guanta. — Back at La Rotonde. — The so-called revolution of Guayana — The assassination of Ducharne. — Making the succession sure. — A letter of Leopolda Baptista-Two Gomez and one crime. — The fall of the intelligencia. — Marquez Bustillos « our one link with civilisation ». — The outbreak of the war in Europe. — Gomez the pro-german. — Fate intervenes. — The final remedy : a conspiracy.

The « legal » advisors of Gomez who wished to bring about a second *Coup d'Etat* tried to persuade him that the scandalous and brutal violation of the decree of July 1913 formed a means of assuring the succession for his dynasty... This action suspended constitutional guaranties throughout Venezuela « on account of existing hostilities » — hostilities which were purely imaginary. But Gomez' instinct was keener than that of his advisors and he resolved to take advantage of the opportunities such a situation offered. First it was, however, necessary to make the hostilities seem a little more genuine.

In order to do this he exaggerated the importance of certain petty disturbances that were occurring in the provinces of Guyana, on the frontiers of La Tachira and to the east of Caracas. Disturbances which, as a matter of fact, he did his best to ferment. He himself was the only real rebel since he was encamped at Macacay in open defiance of the

Constitution. It was thus that he managed to carry on those intrigues which, nine months later, resulted in the Congress of the Plenipotentiaries which nominated and elected the following executives, Victorio Marquez Bustillos, as Provisional President of the Republic, Carraciolo Parra Picon and Jesu Rojas Fernandez as first and second vice-presidents.

The same body elected Gomez, Commander-in-chief of the national military forces with undefined and unlimited powers. It also drew up a statutory law which enabled Gomez to pull the strings that controlled all his puppets. Thus to Marquez Bustillos was assigned the task of attending all the official receptions. For this exhausting labor he received an excellent salary. In addition to this he was to faithfully report everything he did to Gomez and sign all papers that were presented to him in accordance with instruction received from the barracks at Maracay. If he failed to do this he ran the risk of being suddenly and brutally replaced by Carraciolo or Fernandez. Thus in order to satisfy the susceptibilities of the foreign powers a person who was not called Juan Vincente Gomez assumed the presidency and to him all official power were apparently duly transmitted.

But in spite of the success of these manœuvres which would have been appropriate for a comic opera had they not involved the honor of a nation — in spite of the assurance that « everything was going smoothly » which formed the text of the daily telegraphic report sent by the man supposed to be the president to the real head of the state — Gomez natural instincts led him on to extreme measures. In pursuance of his plans he had the official press publish fanstastie telegrams relating the outrages committed by the « rebels » and set all sorts of wild

rumors in circulation. These tales served as excuse for certain arrests. Proceeding a step further he adopted the same tactics he had employed a few months before at Coro <sup>1</sup> and had his agents organize an actual invasion of Venezuelan territory on the frontiers of Guyana. This was possible thanks to the disturbances fermented by General Jose Manuel Hernandez <sup>2</sup>.

Some of the followers of the general believing the movement might succeed took the field actively. They, one and all fell into the net spread by Gomez. The prison in Guyana filled rapidly, the bodies of other « rebels » are still rotting in the forests where they fell. And Gomez had succeeded in two directions. On the one hand he had justified the necessity of the Coup d'Etat, and at the same time paralyzed any opposition that might develop before it had time to become dangerous.

Executions took place on a large scale. For instance at the Rotonde one hundred prisoners arrived of whom fifty were condemned to hard labor. This involved work on the roads under conditions which killed off the unhappy victims very fast. At the instigation of Gomez eighteen of the most daring among these convicts formed a plan to escape. Their plans were, naturally, communicated to the authorities and the same General, who liked to be referred to as the « great and good man », ordered each of the conspirators to receive a thousand strokes of the whip. This order was carried out at the custom house of Guanta by Colonel Silvestre Torres.

All one long morning the thongs whistled through

(1) At the time of pretended warfare in 1913.

(2) A Venezuelan politician, head of the Nationalist party, who was Minister in Washington and lived many years as an exile in the United States.

the air, the flies swarmed around the bare bleeding skin, strips of flesh, drops of blood fell to the ground until the place looked like a slaughter house. The bare ribs of the victims whitened under the pale sun that shone on the beach. Not long ago one of the executioners, Corporal Chicho Chaves, displayed as a trophy the male attributes of one of prisoners which he had picked up off the ground and kept in alcohol.

Of the fifty that remained at La Rotonde five were set free, forty-one died from hunger and exhaustion.

The uprising of General Hernandez, which later was again exploited to the advantage of Gomez as being contrary to the public peace and security, and which Gomez had had a hand in instigating, did really take place after April 1914, when it became evident that Gomez was determined to rule without any regard for constitutional guarantees and that he was definitely decided to play the role of usurper backed by those « volunteers » who always form the bodyguard of Venezuelan despots.

At the same time General Angel Lanza provoked a genuine uprising in the state of Bolivar and Hernandez left Trinitad where he had been in hiding. Accompanied by General Jose Antonio Davila he set out by way of British Guiana to put himself at the head of the forces of the insurgents who were awaiting him. The indiscretions of a man called Gonzalez de la Rosa attracted the attention of the British authorities to the enterprise. In the interests of « international peace » they arrested him at Mora Juana. He was not able to make his escape and continue his journey till a month had elapsed. Meanwhile General Davila, afraid that the same thing would happen to him, returned to Trinitad where

he went into hiding. As soon as the Venezuelan consul heard of this he hastened to inform Guidad Bolivar that both Davila and Hernandez had aban-donned their expedition. This news reached Lanza, leader of the insurgents, who was discouraged and believed himself betrayed by the men whom he has expected to prove allies. Consequently he gave up his struggle and surrendered to the troops of Gomez when Hernandez and his reinforcements were only two days off. Hernandez thereupon returned to Tri-nitad where he assumed the command of the forces collected by General Horaccio Ducharme <sup>1</sup>, who was still carrying on guerilla warfare in the mountains. Later he received word to come to New York in con-nection with a new expedition which however never took place.

Although the efforts of General Ducharme to combat the troops of Gomez did not produce any tangible results they were inspired by a heroic spirit and won for him almost legendary fame. One by one he defeated the forces which were sent out to attack him. Instead of vanquishing his troops the regulars were forced to flee in disorder. After having continued the struggle for two years he was finally lured into an ambush. On the night of August 20, 1915, his forces having been surrounded and he himself having taken refuge at a farm-house, he was surprised and killed while lying in his hammock. Orders had been issued not to take his prisoner but to kill him on the spot. Thus Gomez continued the excellent traditions of President Castro.

Horaccio Ducharme was the son of the famous Padro Ducharme, the intrepid leader of the Conser-

(1) A heroic rebel against the tyranny of Gomez. He was wounded, captured and foully murdered by order of the dictator.

vative forces who passed on to his son his martial and civic virtues. Horaccio possessed in addition to this a fine education and exquisite manner. Brave and loyal leader of daring and ill-fated enterprises, which deserve to rank with the most heroic military exploits chronicled in history, Ducharme the younger was not a half savage guerrilla chieftain such as Martin Espinosa <sup>1</sup>, who roamed through the forest naked to the waist like such legendary centaur, nor was he a adventurer eager for spoil like Paredes. Instead he was animated by high ideals and possessed real military genius.

Meanwhile Dr Leopold Baptista <sup>2</sup> from his exile in Curacao was protesting energetically against the statements of the Minister of the Interior who declared that he could not abolish martial law nor disband the additional levies which Gomez had raised because Baptista and others « not only continued to maintain a hostile attitude towards the duly constituted government but also sought by all means at their disposal both at home and abroad to instigate disturbances and prolong a state of armed rebellion. » Consequently, according to the Minister of the Interior, the election of new candidates to fill the public offices not having been held within the legal time limit, it behoved the different states to make such arrangements as they pleased. This unexpected solution of the situation was ratified by the Congress of Plenipotentiaries. In order to still further prove the inanity of these statements Baptista, who at that time was generally considered as the official head of the opposition in case the latter should ac-

(1) One of the rebel leaders.

(2) Prominent politician and military leader. Philanthropist and scholar has lived in New York since 1913 as an exile.

tually break out in organized warfare, wrote Gomez on January 22 as follows :

« On leaving the Republic against my will, my only aim was to escape personal danger and to take advantage of those liberties which belong to every member of a civilized community. I had no desire to set afoot a rebellion against your authority for, ever since I first entered public life, I have never made my political opinions depend on the conduct that either my friends or enemies might have towards me or the members of my family. On the contrary I was absolutely sincere in my hope that respecting the letter and spirit of our laws and institutions more completely than you done up till that time, you might hold a free and liberal consultation with public opinion during the electoral period and that from this plebiscite might come a lasting and fruitful peace which would benefit the Republic as a whole. It is this hope which caused me up till now to adopt a completely neutral attitude towards what was going on within our boundaries. Therefore, I deny emphatically, that I have by word or deed expressed my hostility towards your government or participated in a war which, as a matter of fact, does not exist. On the other hand I should like to know why you, on futile pretexts, revoked more than half of the Presidents of our different states ; why, last June, you changed the membership of the Government Council which had been duly elected for a period of four years ; why, a month later, you attacked the only candidate who came forward to seek the high office of President of the Republic ; why you imprisoned those who favored his cause ; why, in August, you declared that a state of martial law was necessary throughout the country, whereas, in reality no disturbances existed except on the Colombian

frontier and those only lasted a few days ; why you kept important forces under arms at a time when no enemy threatened the peace of Venezuela ; why you suspended the constitutional guarantees and filled the prisons with political prisoners ; why you prevented the elections being held at the appointed time, and, finally, why you today outrage and violate all those laws which you solemnly swore to maintain ? You, head of the nation by the power which Congress has conferred on you, you should be the first of the nation's faithful servants and the most zealous defender of our national liberties. Instead of accomplishing these sacred duties you have organized and carried out the most infamous revolution recorded in our history. Venezuela, which possesses the power and desire to live as a civilized community, which wishes and needs to enjoy peace at home and abroad in order to develop her natural resources, which has remained quiescent in the hope that her institutions would be respected, this is the country which you have launched upon a bloody and hazardous course. What reasons have you for such conduct ? Only your personal ambition and the desire to remain in power for a longer period than that which our Constitution allows. Would you dare to pursue the same methods if the citizens were able to exercise their political rights, if the states which form our federation were governed under legitimate auspices, if the army, which should be the guardian of our constitutional liberties, was conscious of its duties and ready to perform them ?

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On December 19, 1908, Vice President Gomez had for the first time assumed supreme authority thanks

to an act of treason. Although at the time he had the support of the majority of his countrymen the fact remains that he nevertheless was a traitor to his chief. There is a saying one may take advantage of an act of treason but one should despise the man who commits it.

On August 3, 1913, Gomez, by declaring that a state of war existed although such was not the case and by deliberately violating the Pacte Fondamentale<sup>1</sup>, thanks to the help of a horde of accomplices and the dismayed surprise of the rest of the community disgusted with all these political intrigues and disappointed in their hopes for better government, again appeared as the declared enemy of the Constitution.

In 1915, the third step was taken when the Congress elected Gomez Constitutional President of the Republic for the period of 1915-1922. Although he did not immediately assume office he despoiled himself firmly in power. He remained president-elect of the Republic and Commander-in-Chief of the national military forces which were encamped at Maracay. From there he would occasionally make his appearance at Caracas to see how « friend » Dr Marquez Bustillos, who thanks to the elasticity of the « provisory statute of government » remained president pro-tem with his two vice-presidents Carraciolo Parra and Rojas Fernandez, were getting along. Dr Bracamonte, an officer of Gomez personal staff acted as General Secretary of State and beside the « general » one found Vivas, his military advisor who in reality was the general minister of the regime.

\* \* \*

The « intelligencia », who, together with Gil For-

toul, the charge d'affaires at the Presidency, had taken part in the definite overthrow of the Constitution were not allowed any share in the government. That is how the devil pays his debts. Later Marquez Bustillos formed a nominal cabinet composed as follows. Minister of the Interior Arcaya (something had to be given him as reward for what he had done while serving as member of the Government Council and in connection with the Bank of Venezuela) ; Minister of Foreign Affairs Ignacio Andrade, whose son had married one of Gomez, daughters ; Minister of War Jiménez Rebolledo, minister *in partibus* ; Minister of Finance Roman Cardenas, who invented a method of balancing the budget and practicing economy by paying the government employees only half for their salaries at a time when living conditions were particularly trying ; Minister of Commerce Santiago Fontiveros, an honest, stupid and decrepid old man ; Minister of Public Works, Luis Velez, a prodigy whom Roman Cardenas had discovered ; Minister of Education Gonzales Rencones up to then a clerck in Sante, one of those quack physicians who have been to Paris and wears an imposing beard. Juan Crisostemo Gomez, brother of Juan Vincente, remained Governor,

Marquez Bustillo, president pro-tem, signed his letters to Gomez commander in chief of the national forces «your friend and servant. »

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The role of Bustillos was far from being a sinecure. Dr Vivas would ring the president up on the telephone from Maracay and scold him for what he had done or what he had left undone. The unfortunate official found himself living at the center

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of a triangle whose sides were the restless watchfulness of Gomez, the treacherous nature of Cardenas, Minister of Finance and the implacable and disdainful scorn of Vivas. Nor did his troubles end here. He had also to face the hostility of the General's immediate entourage and that of the members of the Gomez family, who were reluctant to accept this little bearded man in whom Juan Vicente seemed to place absolute confidence and whom he had invested with authority. Then too the political hangers-on of the regime kept intriguing, now in favor of Vivas against Marquez, now for Marquez against Vivas, as the political barometer oscillated. Bustillos, among the other duties of his office also was obliged to sign as president day after day, month after month, year after year, laws which dishonored him as a man, to bear the brunt of the gradually mounting wave of popular scorn, to rattle the empty scabbard of the blade which Gomez kept unsheathed at Maracay. « Doctor Marquez is the one link which unites us to civilization » declared one of his friends General Pablo Giuseppi Monagas.

Shortly afterwards, as I have already said the unfortunate Giuseppi Monagas perished in chains at the prison of La Rotonde while « the only link » continued to decorate an armchair in the left wing of the Palace of Miraflores. Bustillos was a link on the chain of a galley-slave.

On August 3, 1914, war broke out in Europe. What would be the repercussions of this conflict on the fortunes of this absurd, misgoverned and abnormal little republic of South America ? The Foreign Offices of the Allies were prepared to overlook anything, to recognize anything that happened overseas, they had more serious problem close at hand. The pro-german attitude which Gomez adopted

was based on a curious combination of petty rascality and low cunning such as one finds sometimes among the peasant class.

As a matter of fact the only thing the Allies cared about was the support of the United States and there were no reason except purely sentimental ones for taking sides in this far away conflict. On the other hand it might well serve as a useful excuse for persecuting those Venezuelans who dared to have an opinion different from that expressed at Maracaibo headquarters of the pro-German « Gomezists ».

It was natural also that Gomez, with his ~~semi~~ savage psychology which he shared by those around him, should consider it right that the victory should be won by those who opened hostilities, by the great nation of which all he knew was the railroad between Caracas and Valencia and the German minister, von Prolius. Then too his imagination established an analogy between the insolence of William II and the Prussian disdain for the rights of other nations and his own conception of governemental authority and the legitimacy of employing any and all means of maintaining one's position. As he looked at the barbarism of Europe the Venezuelan savage felt that his own attitude was justified. The day of vengeance and slaughter was at hand. The moment had come when, taking advantage of the blood madness that seemed to have swept over the entire world, he would be able to satisfy his lusts undisturbed.

A year later, this disciple of the Teutonic school of politics, adapted to the use of Maracay, had Dr. Viras draw up the celebrated message to Congress in which he declared textually to the members of the national parliament that, as commander-in-chief of the army he would assume the office of pre-

sident of the Republic to which he had been elected twelve months before « whenever I consider that the proper time has arrived for me to do so. »

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Such being conditions in Venezuela and any revolution having become impossible, on account of the European war and while Gomez and his personal clique were firmly installed in power dominating the feeble and scattered efforts of his adversaries and supported by practically all the influential elements of the community, in the face of the dumb acquiescence with which public opinion regarded this state of affairs, what course was there left for us to pursue ?

Only one—to become conspirators.

This we did. The greatest crime a despot commits is to force those who have ideals and aspirations to adopt a hypocritical attitude which weakens their moral character to such an extent that if their plans miscarry they will accept any compromises or waste their strength in fruitless sacrifices.

One of the most painful things about conspiracies, said the unfortunate General Pichegru, is that those who participate in them are obliged to consort with men whom they would refuse to associate with under other circumstances.

## CHAPTER XVIII

Causes and effects of Gomez' pro-German attitude. — Van Prolius. — The minister of the Allies. — Muzzling the press. — An incident of the American invasion of Venezuela.

At the outbreak of the war the Venezuelan government declared itself neutral. In the face of the enthusiasm which the Allied cause aroused in the heart of every Venezuelan who cared for noble ideals of justice and right, Gomez, whose pro-Germans sympathies were very evident, forbade his compatriots to enlist in the forces of any of the belligerents. This action was essentially aimed at the Allies. On the one hand access to Germany and Austria was practically impossible, and on the other it was clear that public opinion favored the cause of France, not only out of affection for that nation but from an instinctive hatred of that form of « gomezisation » represented by the brutal imperialism of Prussia. Then too the majority of Venezuelans felt that tender, almost amorous, affection for France, which is so universal in regard to the country that produced a Voltaire and a Rousseau. Consequently the indignation aroused by the invasion of

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France in 1914 was as violent as though our country's own frontiers had been violated. Opposed to this spirit was the attitude of a small minority consisting of Gomez and his satellites and the members of the German colonies of Maracaibo and Ciudad Bolivar.

Using as excuse its official neutrality the government took care not allow the slightest expression of sympathy for the Allied cause to appear either in the press or in public meetings. The German minister von Proilus who at that time was even more popular with the General than the American Mc Godwins was allowed to do as he pleased. He exploited the situation most skilfully up to the time, when the business-men from Washington intervened and proceeded to « put through a deal ». His only opponents were the British minister at Caracas, who maintained a dignified and aloof attitude and a certain Monsieur Fabre who represented the interests of France in a feeble and stupid manner. Thus it was easy for von Proilus to influence the mind of Gomez as he pleased. Moreover the dictator and his pro-German followers were too ignorant to form a proper estimate of the importance of the European conflict. To them Emperor William II appeared simply to be a sort of blonder General Gomez who had been to school and who ruled a thickly populated country, the French were a nation of simple souls, « suckers » and « easy marks » living in a country where nobody was sent to jail for their political opinions, a country where opposition to the government was limited to newspaper articles and speeches in Congress, a country from which one imported one's gowns and mistresses. England was a nation of shopkeepers drawn into the quarrel of the other nations simply to make a profit out of it and because the Germans undersold her on the world markets. As for Belgium it was merely a little king.

dom which could be kicked aside by a stronger power.

The famous statement of Bethmann-Hollweg that «treaties are nothing but scraps of paper» was welcome indeed to the ears of the tyrant of Maracay who a year before had already treated the Venezuelan constitution as a negligible quantity. Another factor in forming pro-German sentiment was the army drilled along strictly Prussian lines by the Chilian officer Mc Gill. Every martially minded peasant and laborer, who wore the same uniform and helmet as the Germans, who obeyed the same guttural words of command, who goose-stepped, marched and counter-marched in accordance to the rules prescribed by the Kriegschule at Potsdam, felt himself in some absurd fashion linked to that formidable war machine whose units he imagined vaguely were animated by a savage fanaticism similar to his own. These elements, together with a hatred for «Highbrows», for those French people who talk about Justice and Liberty, those words that echoe so unpleasantly in the ears of an ignorant despot, were craftilly exploited by von Prolius. Thus it came about that at the beginning of the war the attitude of Venezuelan government was a mere burlesque of true neutrality. Nor did the representatives of the Allies make a single effective protest although such an action would have been amply justified. For we find a German ship in Venezuelan waters giving information to German cruisers at sea, Another vessel escaping from the West Indies anchored at La Guira. Although she possessed no proper clearance papers the vessel, thanks to the complicity of von Prolius and the German form of Blohm, who could exercise pressure of the government authorities on account of some fraudulent stock-exchange transactions in the past, secured the necessary papers, loaded up with

coal and sailed out to sea with the avowed intention of reprovisioning men-of-war. This attitude on the part of the authorities explains still another disgraceful episode.

When certain private parties desired with the help of the official representatives of the Allies, to found a newspaper which would influence public opinion the German minister protested. Whereupon Gomez, acting through Dr. Marquez Bustillos, gave ordres to suppress the « Avion », as the paper was called, and to imprison the staff if they insisted on continuing to publish the sheet. Such a measure met with the opposition of the French, British and Italian colonies. The associations of the « Alliance Française » and « Fratellanza Italiana » undertook to establish a news-sheet of their own. In order to do this, however, they were obliged to secure a special permit from the government and agree that the editor in charge must be a foreigner. This publication of which no one was prepared to assume the editorial responsibility finally appeared but it was killed off by means which unscrupulous people frequently employ in such cases. Orders were given at the different branch post-offices to hamper the distribution and whenever possible to destroy the packages containing the newspaper. Under such circumstances the paper could not survive. Shortly afterwards one of its editors, Rafael de la Gova, was forced to leave the country. Another member of the editorial staff, Firmin Huizi, was thrown into prison. Meanwhile the two twin slander sheets *El Universal* and *El Nuevo Diario* continued to publish exclusively reports of the progress of events emanating from Germany. At the same time the German businessmen at Maracaibo and Ciudad Bolivar and the Germans at Caracas spent large sums to further their political propaganda and the Italian

Minister was obliged to complain of the violent attacks against his country, which appeared in one of the papers. All this however was less serious than the negotiations which were being carried on secretly involving the cession of the island of Margarita to Germany as a submarine base.

The entrance of the United States into the war on the side of the Allies and the pressure the Americans brought to bear on Marques Bustillos in order to have him issue a statement formally condemning the use of submarines after the sinking of the Lusitania appeared to somewhat alter the situation. But the « General's » dislike of the Allies transformed itself into a violent although secret hatred of all his compatriots who were known to support their cause. He took steps to stop press despatches from abroad appearing in *El Luchador* of Ciudad Bolivar and attempted to do the same indirectly in the case of *El Fonografo* of Maracaibo and the papers of Caracas.

Since 1915 I had been the joint editor of the latter newspaper with Edouardo and Carlos Lopez Bustamante. It was the only daily in Venezuela that resembled a modern newspaper. I remained attached to it till 1917 and the campaign we carried on in its columns was a violent one in favor of the Allied cause. In 1917 one of the Bustamante brothers went to Caracas where he undertook to bring out a local edition. This, although backed by pro-allied sympathizers, did not last long. Using as a pretext the fact that I reprinted from the theosophic magazine *Darhma* an article by Dr Dominguez Acosta<sup>1</sup>, the editor, in which he pointed out the moral justification for the attitude of the allies and the moral obligation of the Venezuelan republic to support their cause I was sent

(1) Well known writer murdered in the Rotonde.

to prison. The same thing happened to the Lopez brothers at Caracas. At Maracaibo Mr Arturo Lares Ecleverria, one of the staff at Caracas, protested to Marquez Bustillos against the illegality of such actions. The result was that he speedily found himself also behind the bars. This blow proved fatal to our enterprise. Up till then the various local and national despots had refrained from touching the newspaper whose success was based upon its powerful influence on public opinion. Now its owners and editors were thrown into prison, Eduardo in the fort of San Carlos and Carlos in the Rotonde at Caracas, the appearance of these two eight-page paper represented the result of the efforts of two generations. Both printing plants connected with the papers were obliged to shut down. The enterprise was completely ruined and the brothers are today living in exile.

People familiar with conditions in Venezuela from first hand observation know the bitterness of our local quarrels. They poison and distort even our good deeds and noble aspirations. Love becomes corruption, pride aggressiveness. For instance when a violent fire destroyed a group of houses and we opened a subscription in the papers which resulted in a hundred poor people having a roof over their heads within a month, we were told that we had capitalized a catastrophe. Some privately owned municipal utility corporations were taking shameful advantage of the public. We disclosed the fact, forced them either to dissolve or to improve their service — and were abused and maligned by the very people whose interest we had sought to defend.

Again when one of Gomez's henchmen attempted to open a gambling hell in Maracay we called attention to the fact and were attacked not only by the gamblers but also by the respectable element of the

town. When we expressed our disgust at the way in which the funds spent by the German colony at Zulia poisoned public opinion, and led to a complete misinterpretation of the issues at stake in the European conflict, the only result of our protest was to stir up a movement of violent personal antagonism to our ideas. It was necessary for us to defend ourselves tooth and nail.

It was at this period that the vast riches formed by the oil-fields of Venezuela first began to be exploited. The wells at La Rosita for example promised to pay fabulous dividends. Here too several powerful interests were in conflict. The English were on the spot, likewise the Standard Oil disguised under the name of the Caribbean Petroleum Company. The latter organization sent out prospectors and drillers, both towards San Lorenzo and on the shores of the Motatan. A certain Mr Malendez sold the first concession. His example spread like wild fire. By the end of 1918 the Yankees had extended the limits of their concessions in all directions forcing out the unfortunate farmers who chose rights to their small estates which are called « chaos » were based on the fact that they had been exploiting them for the last ten years.

When I arrived at Zulia the Minister of the Interior appointed me Inspector of the region of Tierras Baldias.

This post was a purely honorific one and carried with it a mere pittance as salary while bringing into the public treasury several thousand bolivares which I would otherwise have had to be collected as taxes. I travelled far and wide across the immense prairies, lodging for the night in the huts of those poor Indians whom the Northern invader was gradually driving off their homesteads unless they were willing to accept the rule of the newcomers and sell their services for a

miserable wage. It was here, on the spot, that I witnessed the scandalous transactions of a small group of fools who bartered away at Caracas, for sums far beneath their real value, the potential sources of great national wealth. At the same time the same individuals allowed the peasant to be despoiled of his few possessions.

As an example of the incidents in which I took part I might mention an episode which occurred on the plains one day when I was inspecting the surveying of an estate which the owner wished to have made. While thus engaged our work was interrupted by the arrival at our camp of a certain Mr Nash who, armed and accompanied by other rascals of the same type, announced that we were to immediately leave « his property » on which we were trespassing.

« Who has given you the right to issue such orders ? I asked.

« The Company... » he replied, laying his hand on the stock of his two revolvers.

Our party was a small one. It consisted merely of the person who was the survey made, the engineer Enrique Vilchez and two servants. When the encounter occurred two *goajiros*, with slanting eyes and high cheek-bones took their places silently at our side caressing as they did so the long blades of their *machetes*. I showed the blond barbarian the papers empowering me to carry out the survey on behalf the government. At the same time I pointed to a path that led away from our encampment suggesting as I did so that it might be advisable for him to take it. He hesitated, eyed uneasily the silent *peons* and my companion, who has produced from his saddle bag where he had stowed it away along with bits of cheese and cracker, an antique but still impressive horse-pistol, turned on his heel and disappeared. Had I

made the slightest gesture my companions would have hacked him to bits. It was in July. The heat was terrific. All around us extended a sea of tall, dry grass which whipped viciously at our faces as we forced our way slowly through it. An hour after Mr Nash had taken himself off one of the *goajiros* uttered a cry. Pointing towards the route over which we had just come he showed us curling masses of smoke rapidly advancing in our direction. The prairie was on fire ! The nearest river lay five miles away. After frantic efforts we reached it just in time. Already the flying sparks had burned our clothes and scorched our skin. While we fled for our lives we seemed to hear behind us the gallop of horses, the savage yells of the Far West and the whistle of bullets. That night, when weak and exhausted, we had at last again found our route we met with Mr Guilermoz and some peons. The next day at dawn we continued our survey of the burned prairies.

When I returned to Maracaibo a month later I found Dr Lazardo Esteva, lawyer for the Caribbean Petroleum Company, had brought suit against me on behalf of Rowland Matteir who represented the company in that district. The charges, which were brought to the attention of the President of the Republic, were that at the head of a guerilla band I had threatened to kill the «boss» directing the Company's operations, at a time when said boss was on ground occupied by and belonging to the Company.

I sent in a long and detailed report of the episode to the Minister of the Interior who was my immediate chief. Doctor Carlos Grisanto who was in charge of the legal section of the ministry considered that I was entirely justified in my actions and that the Government should see to it that its rights were respected. Shortly afterwards however the Minister Pe-

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dro Emilio Coll was removed. Santiago Fontiveros took his place. When I again brought up the matter, which I considered involved a question of national honor, the Minister replied by a telegram which I have kept in which he thanked me for what I had done and at the same time notified me that some one else was to take over my post.

At the present time the Venezuelan government is in the grip of the American business interests. This is what has allowed Gomez to remain in power. The facts remain what they are, all the talk of international good-will, the erection of statue of Bolivar the Liberator, the exchange of gifts such as the swords of de Paez and the pistols of Pershing are merely a farce intended to fool the public and distract attention from the sinister doings that are going on behind the scenes. This is what has really and truly happened to what Lansing, Hughes and Kellogg termed a constitutional and established government. It has become the prey of the invader.

## CHAPTER XIX

How certain private incidents explain public events. — The martyrs no one martyred. — Soldiers and journalists. — The Hour of Destiny. — Gomez and the grippé. — Studies in cowardice. — A pro. Ally demonstration and what came of it. — In Death's anti-chamber. — The night of the conspiracy.

About the middle of 1918 while I was preparing one of my novels for publication I settled down definitely at Caracas. I had reason to believe that my life was in danger in the midst of the barbarians who Matute Gomez had brought with him. Even before their arrival a local gangster, known as El Gatico, had been obliged to spend several weeks in the hospital with a bullet through his shoulders for certain reasons which we both knew very well but which he did not care to talk about. On several different occasions I had had to defend myself from various attacks ranging from the perfidious notes in the daily press, to encounters with drunken men who tried to pick a quarrel but suddenly became sober when matters came to a head. My volume « *Tierra del Sol Amada* » is a faithful picture of a curious psychologie moment in the life of this province which contains the germs of extraordinary activity for good or evil. It was a strange spectacle to see how, not only in the Zulia<sup>1</sup> but

(1) A province in Venezuela of which Maracaibo is the capital.

throughout the country the inhabitants, victims of the foreign invader, turned, not against him, but against their compatriots who sought to protect the national interests. A spectator watching it is reminded of a scorpion who pricks himself with his own tail when threatened by the flames. My books, good or bad, are a result of the feverish atmosphere in which I lived at the time, and of my violent and sincere revolt at the sight of the misery and injustice that surrounded me on all sides. They are like veins torn from a living body that still throb when exposed to the air. My readers consisted partly of those who feel the sacredness of righteous wrath and the necessity of condemning openly existing iniquities, partly of those whose souls and bodies have been seared by suffering. My public is made up of the common people. They have always found me fighting their battles, taking sides with them, not out of any spirit of demagogism or selfish ambition as those who seek to stick on official labels on each and every writer declare, but because I worship Truth and believe the good of the people is best served by giving them the truth, that highest form of art, which remains great even when it tears aside the fragile stuff that dreams are made of and which so many believe should be the only material employed by a novelist.

During one of my trips to the capital, on board a coasting vessel, I became acquainted with Captain Andrade Mora. He had just come from Tachura, was newly married and had lately been to see his family. Among our fellow passengers, also going to Caracas, were the General Parra Picon, Vice-President of the Republic, and Dr Miguel Parra Picon, member of the Senate. During our few days on ship-board I saw a good deal of Captain Mora. He was short, blond man, unassuming in his manner and reserved in the expres-

sion of his opinions. As the screw churned through the waters of the Caribbean we spoke together and grieved mutually over the gloomy future that seemed to lie in store for our beloved country. We vowed to do what we could to avert the catastrophe. This oath death was soon to seal in a solemn manner.

Little did I guess at the time that this modest, quiet little person was shortly to become a hero and at the same time lay down his life as holocaust. But as we talked together I came to understand that he, like many of his brother officers, hated to find himself obliged to play a servile role carrying out the orders of brutal and ignorant masters. It was this spirit of patriotism which inspired their plans from the outset. Men of all ages and of all shades of political opinion co-operated in the common cause. Even those who only knew by hearsay what was going on kept the secret. And they still keep it. Shortly before the Armistice marked the end of the European conflict the conspiracy had stretched out its tentacles into the most distant provinces. It had its center in the capital itself, within the ranks of that army with the cowardly tyrant had surrounded himself. Matters were better prepared this time than they had been in the days of the Delgado-Chalbaud affair. All those who took part in the plot were animated by a certitude of success which was the surest sign of approaching victory.

The most patriotic and devoted element in the conspiracy was formed by a group of well-to-do young men. They were popular with their immediate chiefs. The latter in many cases owed their promotion to rank favoritism rather than to ability or knowledge in any way superior to that of their subordinates. Some of these leaders themselves, actively engaged in politics and either actually occupying important

positions or anxious to be appointed to them, knew what was going on and even helped us indirectly. Later they went over to the opposite camp becoming the severest persecutors of those whom they had previously aided, as though to efface any memory of their earlier sympathies or as if they feared that a luke-warm attitude might be compromising. But those who had thrown themselves heart and soul into the movement fought the good fight to the end. When the movement failed some, stricken in health and impoverished in fortune, sought to earn a living abroad and knew the bitterness that comes from having to eat the bread of aliens strangers, still others lie at rest in the cemetery or ended their martyrdom behind the bars of a prison cell.

Many signs and tokens seemed to tell that the day of liberty was at hand. At home the government multiplied its vexations. From overseas came a breath of freedom. The masses in whose ears sounded the fall of the European despotism, drunk with the news of victory of the armies of Right and Justice, imagined that the forces which were freeing their European brethren would also overthrow the petty tyrants of the Southern nations. The speeches of Wilson stirred our spirits, the clarion call of French trumpets, sounding the forward march of the liberators, echoed in our hearts, shouts of joy came to us from across the Atlantic, the shadows which still stretched across the skies seemed like that friendly darkness which precedes the dawn. Little did we guess that they really marked the beginning of a still darker night. In short we could not help but feel that the psychological moment had come and that fate was about to create the chance incident which would fire the train.

One morning the epidemic of grippe which was scattering its poison far and wide appeared at La

Guaira. There was one case, then another, then a third, then a dozen, then a hundred. People dropped in the streets of the capital like leaves in a storm. The blast of death swept the city from the suburbs to the center. Gomez, master of Venezuela, the man who proclaims himself « a firm and benevolent » ruler, who loves his compatriots so dearly and has sacrificed himself so unselfishly on their behalf for the last fifteen years, became alarmed. At first he shut himself up in his official quarters taking all sorts of ridiculous precautions against contagion. But this was not sufficient. When the spread of the plague became ever more rapid and reached the outlying districts the cowardly tyrant went still further away and sought refuge at Maracay. But still death pursued him. One of his sons, the one he perhaps cared the most for, Ali, was stricken down and lived only a few hours. Gomez refused to go near the dying man's bedside. Next another member of his family succumbed. All about him was disease. The pestilence swept on and on, galloping ever faster under the clouds of the September sky. It crossed the valleys of Aragua and contaminated Valencia. And as it spread so Gomez tried to distance it, going ever further afield. More terrified by the fear of a microbe than by the sound of firing, which he claimed to hear constantly in the distance, « the hero of December » heeded neither the call of his official responsibilities nor the instincts of common benevolence but thought only of his own safety.

Thus it came about that he at length found himself at San Juan de los Morros, a village where there are some sulphur springs and which lies at the base of the mountains. Here this despot so cruel, so pitiless, so deaf to compassion and any spirit of pity crouched in the rocky caverns much as one of the jaguars of

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Bajo Apure<sup>1</sup> seeks refuge in the hills when the prairies are on fire. With him were his brother Juanchito, Governor of the Federal Province, and a group of his henchmen.

Here at San Juan Gomez stayed while his capital, left to its own resources, quivered in agony. Such medical service as there was was directed by Dr. Márquez Bustillos who had received orders to remain at his post while his master fled and who scarcely ventured to go a few miles out into the country on urgent business so much more did he fear the wrath of Gomez than the pestilence itself. But the police, in charge of Delgado Bricenco, one of those poor rascals who come to the surface during periods of unrest as certain crabs crawl out of the mud at high tide, interfered with the activities of philanthropic societies trying to stem the tide of contagion for fear that this charity might conceal a political maneuvre.

It was about this time that certain persons are said to have called the attention of Gomez to the fate of the political prisoners shut up at La Rotonde. These unfortunate beings, locked in their narrow cells, their feet chained to iron balls weighing ten, sixty or a hundred and seventy-five pounds apiece were without proper food or medecine of any kind. It was impossible for them to assist one another in any way. All they could do was to watch the steady approach of what seemed certain death. And Death came, looked at them, and passed on. On the other hand one evening there stopped at each cell Dr Requena, a physician in favor with Don Juanchito. After speaking a few words to each prisoner Requena gave them some woolen blankets, a most exceptional favor as neither additional covers or clothing of any kind are

(1) The prairie district of Venezuela.

allowed. He also distributed some medecine and went on his way, well content doubtless with having carried out his charitable visit on behalf of his chief. Not a single prisoner died. But neither did a single one touch the remedies which Requena had left with them.

One morning when the sky was heavily clouded, a few weeks later a meeting was held at one of the newspaper offices. In the center stood a plain wooden table. The room was lighted by a flickering lantern. The men who had gathered here belonged to various ranks of society. Some of them were men of position other laborers, still others newspaper reporters. One noted towards the back of the courtyard the grey cloaks covering the uniforms of a number of officers. A lieutenant-colonel, several captains were present. By their side were workmen silent, obedient, ready to go through with any task that might be assigned to them. As the delegates of the different sections of the city arrived each said a few words. Many had not slept for the past fifty-six hours. Nor had they stopped their feverish preparations to take any nourishment. In one corner on a couple of benches were the remains of a hasty meal, cold meat and a couple of empty bottles. On the linotype machine, the keyboard of which was lighted by a lantern held by a gigantic negro, a manifesto was being hurriedly set up. This proclamation was to be distributed that same day throughout the city.

For the hour had arrived. The revolt was ready to burst out. A few days before an episode had occurred which served as an excellent excuse. While a celebration in honor of the King of the Belgians was taking place the police, whips and sabers in hand, had attacked and dispersed a group of students and civilians who had been holding a demonstration in front of the Allied legations. The flags of France,

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England, Belgium, Italy and the United States had been torn from the hands of their bearers and dozens of students were thrown into prison after having been violently beaten. This had been planned beforehand. Pedro Garcia had distributed leather thongs to the police saying as he did so, « Cow-hide's good enough for the people of Caracas ».

The charge of the police took place immediately after the usual speeches had been made. The ranks of the crowd contained besides the students and their friends many police spies who were armed and ready for trouble. Needless to say *they* were not molested. For some reason, which has never been made clear, the Allied flags snatched from the students, those flags made glorious by the battles of Flanders, of the Marne and of the Carso and which were being waved by young and enthusiastic patriots in an outburst of admiration, were turned over by the police to the representatives of the Allies. Monsieur Leonard Bourseaux, the Belgian Chargé d'Affaires, took the part of the crowd and angrily demanded the release of the persons who had been arrested, going so far as to protest in the name of Belgium against the outrage that had taken place. The other ministers accepted the trophies so heroically won by the hirelings of Gomez. Among them, and especially prominent, was Preston McGoodwin from the United States who played a double game, on the one hand sending the conspirators messages of encouragement and revolutionary tracts, while on the other he received favors from official circles.

On the morning of the meeting just described we were aware of what had taken place. And we were conscious of the indignation it had aroused throughout the city. Dr. Pedro Manuel Ruiz, one of the leaders of the movement, who was later to pay

with his life in the midst of abominable tortures, the mistake of having trusted certain men and certain phrases, had said to me.

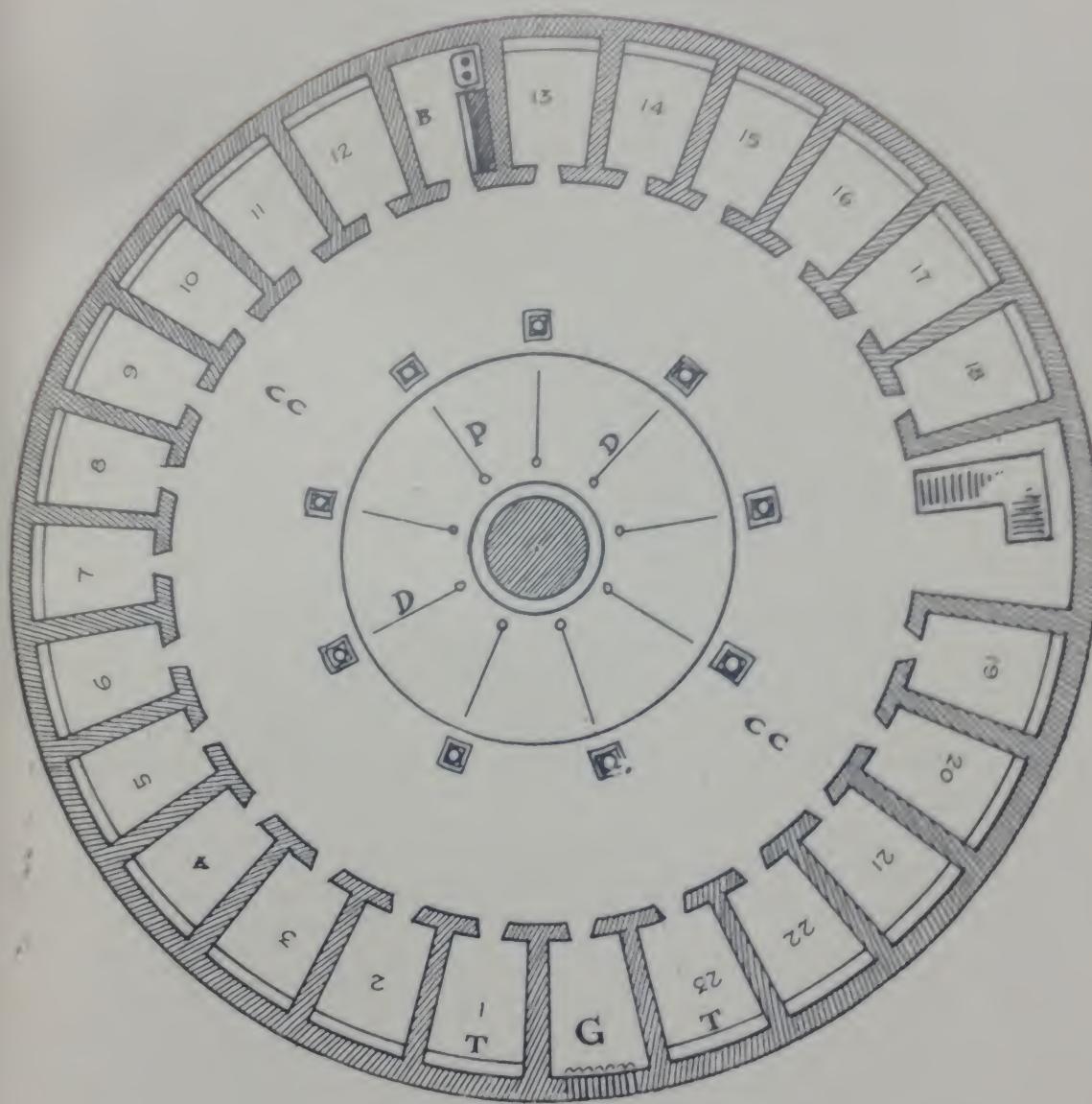
« You will see. This stupid riot will cost Gomez his power. All we will have to do will be to show what lies back of the movement in favor of national independence, which will come to a head shortly, in order to have the Allied powers withdraw their support of Gomez and bring about his complete overthrow. »

« No, doctor, I do not agree with you. What the Venezuelans will not do with their own hands will never be done by others. Do not count on foreign support. »

And now our last preparations were being made. It had been agreed that Colonel X was to seize the police headquarters and, acting in liaison with the group who were to take possession of the automobiles that were in the public garages, patrol the city and concentrate reserve bodies of troops in the suburbs. These would act in cooperation with General Y... who was to surprise La Guaira, where his arrival was already expected and which would give him the control of the harbor.

In the meanwhile General Roberto Gonzalez, commanding a group of a hundred men, was to arrest Marquez Bustillos, acting President at Dos Caminos. Bustillos, in view of the change, in the situation, would be forced sign the proclamation which would be placed before him and at the same time announce his resignation. As for the troops garrisoned at Caracas they, having been assembled in the courtyards of the respective barracks and the leaders who sympathized with the Gomez regime having been arrested, the rest were to proclaim the formation of a national civic union. Keeping the same staffs of officers and reinforcing the regular troops with the volunteers

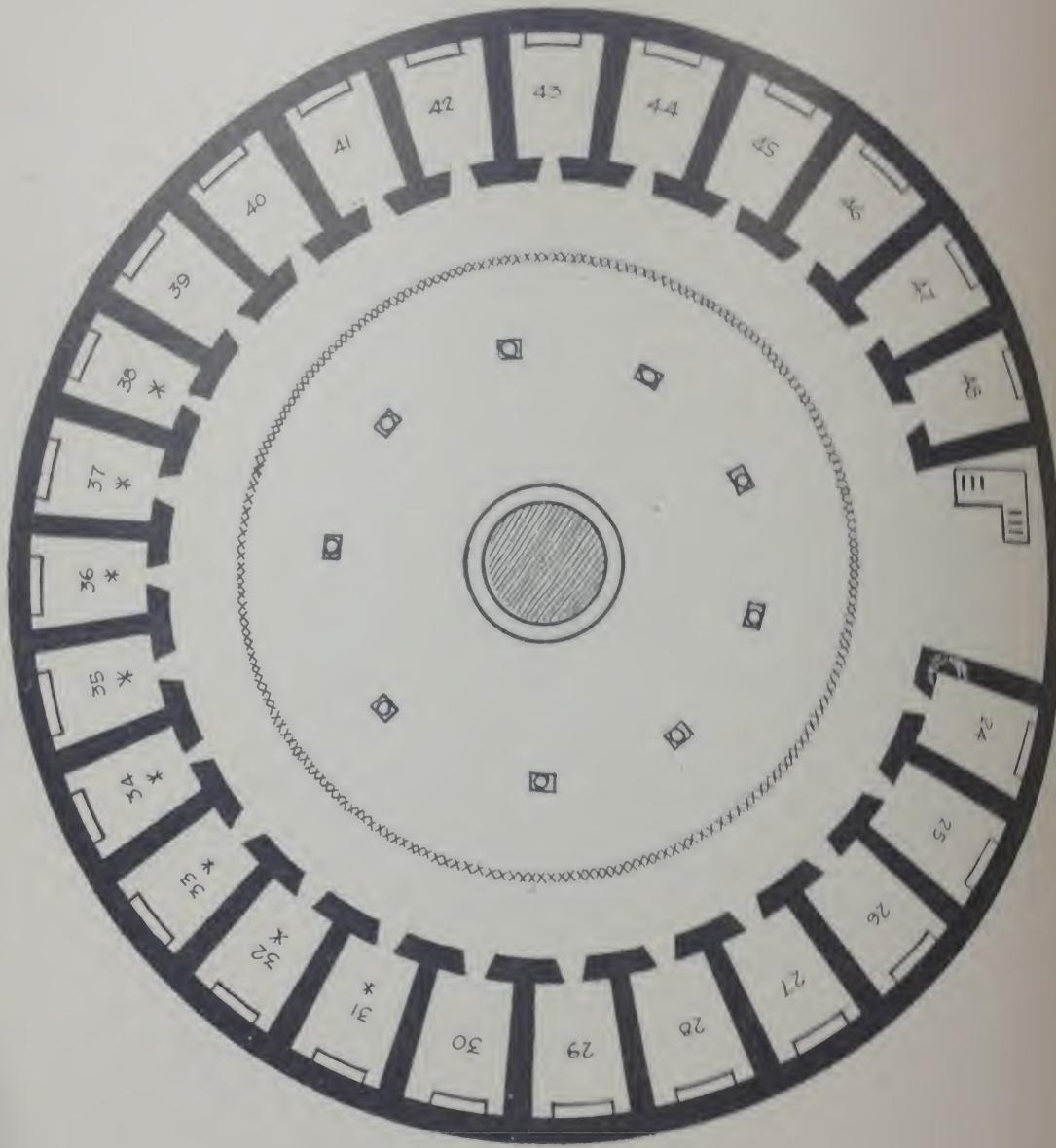
## THE ROTONDE



GROUND-FLOOR

G Grating at entrance.  
B Bath and W.-C.  
TT Plank fixed to wall and used as bed.  
CC Corridor under the gallery on the First Floor.  
DD Pillars.  
1-2-3 etc Cells.

## THE ROTONDE



FIRST-FLOOR

X Series of eight cells (Nos 31-38) where were confined sixteen officers involved in the Plot of 1919. They were confined two in each cell both chained to the same leg-iron "grillos". Six died between September 6 and December 22 that year.

from Caracas a few leaders would be enough raise the necessary forces to combat Gomez in the valleys of Aragua. It would be impossible for the latter to attack us for at least three days. By that time we would have been able to reach an understanding with the provinces of Carabobo, Lara and Falcon. We did not count on the support of Miranda. The other provinces knew what was going on and were too far away to be able to interfere in any way. Moreover by driving forward along the Tachira, Arauca and the Eastern sea-coast one energetic push would be sufficient. Cucuta, Curazao and Trinidad had already been informed of what was to take place.

It had been agreed that a volley fired at four o'clock in the morning in the courtyard of the San Carlos barracks, situated just North of Caracas, should be the signal which would set the vast machine in motion.

One of those present took up the enormous parcel of proclamations which were to be struck on the walls. Another distributed a few weapons. When I left the meeting-place only two of my companions remained crouching in the courtyard. Their eyes were fixed on the stars. I went down towards the Grand Hotel in order to change my clothes, take a little rest and see to certain private papers I had in my room. On my way there an automobile filled with policemen passed me. It was going South. I stepped aside, retreating into the shadow cast by a gateway at the corner of Pajaritos. The strange car passed out of sight. My watch said half-past two. All precautions had been taken. The lines of the web were in telephonic contact with two outlying posts equidistant from the center. No matter what unlooked for incident might occur nothing at, this eleventh hour, could interrupt the execution of our plans. The only thing

it might do would be to modify them. And in every case two plans of campaign had been worked out to meet every possible emergency.

I only remained in my room a few moments. Leaving the hotel I hired a broken down old carriage, one of those vehicles whose coachman is always asleep. In it I drove by the Mamey barracks and the one situated at the Planta Electrica del Pariaso, then on passed the long, gloomy, yellow wall of the Rotonde facing the esplanade, in front of which two sentinels walked up and down. Everything was quiet. I left the carriage and strolled up, by way of San Francisco to the square beside the entrance to the Police Headquarters, smoking as I did so. There, under a little tree stood two men, the head of the local police, Pedro Garcia and the Prefect. I thought they had recognized me. A few moments later I felt I was being followed. Two police spies were walking behind me, quite casually humming a tune, as they came along. Considering that it was late for an arrest to take place I did not worry but went over to a news-stand and bought a package of cigarettes. After which, without hurrying in the least, I returned to my hotel. The spies went off convinced that I was going to bed. I went out an hour later and walked towards the Place du Pantheon.

San Carlos barracks, also known as La Trinidad, is a couple of dozen yards away. I sat down in the shelter of a tree facing the clock which dominates the square. How slowly, how desperately slowly the hand moved. Half past three, a quarter to four, seven minutes to four. Four o'clock. Slowly the four strokes sounded over the silent park. The Avila loomed like a shadow out of the mist. The lights grew dim. A forewarning of dawn stole over the sky.

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The volley which at four o'clock was to wake the city and the nation had not been fired.

Something had gone wrong. The shape of the Pantheon, with its ugly outline like an unsightly church showed itself in the growing light.

What had happened to Captain Andrade Mora and the officers of Trinidad barracks ?

Never, not the time I was shipwrecked, nor a little later on when I lay waiting for death in my prison cell, nor during the long nights of anguish and terror which lay before me, did I feel an agony comparable with that which flooded my being at this instant.

It was not a plot that had failed. It was the Republic which had perished. Yet all remained calm. Not a sound was to be heard. On a distant hillside glimmered through the mists the lights of a little farmhouse.

## CHAPTER XX

The first victims are imprisoned. — A cowardly vengeance. — The obscure, far-fetched and personal causes of the crithe of 1919. — Pen sketches of the Prefet Carvallo and the Chief of Police. — Vicentico Gomez Gargantua, a character out of Rabelais. — Why the nephew hated his uncle. — The students. — The night of January 19. — Carvallo in action. — Imprisonment without trial. — The Governor's message. — Other arrests. — How the cells were arranged and the means of making them bearable. — Free? — On the threshold of the torture chamber. — The whispering curtains. — Pinero, the traitor.

When I reached the newspaper office at ten o'clock after having spent several hours worrying about what had happened I heard that at eleven o'clock the night before the captain of Artillery, Luis Rafael Pimentel, had been arrested. Other arrests were also said to have taken place. A meeting was called immediately. Each of those present reported that he was being shadowed. I was the only one who noticed nothing unusual going on around me except the two spies who had accompanied me to my hotel. Nevertheless we concluded that for the time being the police were merely suspicious without any real evidence to act on, and we had best not pay any attention to them.

We were sure those who had been arrested would not say anything. It would only be necessary to wait a few days before again launching our enterprise. In view of the fact that everyone was more or less nervous during this period when the European war was

drawing to its close and since it is characteristic of the Venezuelan temperament to pay more attention to what Mr Wilson might be saying than to what, was happening in their own backyard it was difficult to tell to what extent the government was really alarmed

On the other hand the number of those taking part in the movement seemed to make success a certainty. That very morning some fifty young men had been hiding under the Junin Bridge waiting for the signal to be given. Not receiving any news they emerged from their hiding place and went about their business without being molested in any way. The person in command of the two largest groupes of conspirators reported that till noon the only news he had received was that of the arrest of Pimentel and of one or two others. This might be the result of some local intrigue in that particular barracks. Any suspicious action on our part would only hurt the prisoner's cause. We agreed to separate and to remain on the alert.

Fifty-six hours went by. One morning I was leaving the Grand Hotel when three automobiles making a great racket and driving at a desperate speed rushed by me. In the first car I recognized Vicente Gomez dressed in white and wearing a black band on his arm. His face was flushed, his small, clear yet stupid eyes scrutinized everyone he passed. In the other cars were members of that body-guard whom we used to call « the Gomez », poor rascals grasping rifles in a menacing attitude as though prepared to open fire on any one who ventured in make a threatening gesture in the direction of « General Vicente ». The three cars left in their trail an odor of gasolene and violence.

It was reported that numerous arrests had been made in the different barracks, among those taken into custody being a major, some captains and a number of non-commissioned officers. The Governor of

Caracas, Don Juancho, was also stated to be in the city. The secretary attached to the government, so we were informed by friends of the Miraflores with whom he was stopping, presented the governor a long list of those said to be compromised in the affair and Don Juancho ran his pencil through them all. Of course the secretary really had no exact information but he took this opportunity to revenge himself on a certain number of his personal enemies. Vicente, who had lost favor with his father on account of the misconduct he had been guilty of when he occupied the position of Inspector in the army, the duties of which position were actually performed by one of his henchmen Pedro Alcantara Real, realised that the moment was a good one to rehabilitate himself and show Gomez the Elder that his son had real ability, energy and will power.

In addition to the menace formed by the actual conspiracy, of which he had not known anything in advance and about which he had not as yet found out anything, there was another factor which played a predominant part in determining the attitude adopted by young Gomez. The policy of Juan Vicente of conferring positions and power on members of his family had led to the placing of his cousins and brother-in-law at the head of important departments in different provinces. Later he trained his brother Juan Crisostomo to hold office, by a few years of « active contact with practical politics » as they were carried on at the capital of the state of Miranda of which he was later to become the governor. It was Juan Crisostomo who followed closely what was being done in the civilian and political spheres by Marquez Bustillos seconded in this task by Lorenzo Carvallo, a former policeman, deceitful and tricky. Carvallo in turn obeyed the orders of the chief of Police Pedro

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Garcia a man whose antecedents may be judged from the fact that on coming to the city from his provinces he managed a house of ill-fame in the slums. There he learned to hate and despise the city and its people as he saw them through the frequent debauches of Pot-de-fer where he also heard what silly or careless people said about the national politics. The information thus obtained he passed on to that eternal coward Gomez who, a few yards away in his retreat called El Paraiso, was straining his ears to catch every tell-tale whisper. Since then Garcia had gained new favors from his master by the implacable and brutal manner in which he enforced « order » among the citizens of Caracas. What lay behind his hatred ? Where did it spring from ? These are questions I cannot answer. Only those who make use of these human machines, these beings ready to execute any order, prepared to commit any sort of atrocity, can say in what searing fires have been tempered the steel of which such souls are made. The Prefect was the more clever of the two, the chief of police the more sincere. The former is wily, always knowing how to contrive ingenious schemes and to lay cunning traps, the other operates more directly and possesses a blind obedience such as one finds in half-civilized savages. Pedro Garcia would never act as an emissary from his master bearing to the victim the gilded cord with which to commit suicide ; if he is told that such a man is to die he would rather strangle him with his own hands. His value lies in his loyalty rather than in his intelligence .Such were the two men who, aided by a throng of acolytes ruled with a rod of iron a city whose citizens had first despised them and finally grovelled before their shadow. On the other hand Carvallo is capable occasionally of a kind action, of a generous deed. Naturally he is ashamed of such

incidents, refuses to admit that he has had anything to do with them, and to prove it immediately displays still greater violence and cruelty. The fact nevertheless remains and these alternate currents in his character, which are all the more important on account of the fear and respect with which he is considered by the public, entitle him to be considered as the least repulsive member of « the gang ».

I met this man in circles where free speech even in his presence was tolerated. It seemed at times as though there was something in his soul that aspired towards better things. I feel that he deserves to be pitied rather than scorned. Under a constitutional, properly organized government Garcia would have a remarkable fine head of the secret service. Gomez turned him into a blood-stained executioner. This is one more sin that tyrants have on their conscience, that they warp natures which Almighty had shaped for higher ends.

Each man watching his neighbors, both those immediately over him whom he seeks to denounce and those below him by whom he is constantly liable to be betrayed, such is the form of society which Gomez has developed and which holds him in position. Under such a regime the police force has plenty to do. Although the greater part of their activity is devoted to political matters, by which I mean the persecution and repression of any opposition party, nevertheless the criminal classes are also carefully watched.

No sooner had « General » Vicentico appeared on the scene than he realized what was taking place and the opportunities the situation offered him. There was for example a rare chance to show his father that the latter's brother, in whose capacities the President believed, was nothing but a fool. That, for instance, he had allowed a vast conspiracy to be hatched under

his very eyes in the capital and even among the troops. On the other hand it was for Vicentico to indicate that he was a real leader, the only man capable of handling the situation properly, of winning back the officers or at least of preventing the movement from spreading. This desire on the part of Vicentico was all the stronger as he had for a long time felt bitterly about the partiality his father displayed towards Don Guancho. His jealousy had increased as time went on and become acute when, upon entering public life, his favorites, some officers and unscrupulous Caracians, impressed on him that he was far superior to the « heir apparent » in intelligence and force of character. In addition to this there was a profound antipathy for his uncle, one of those antipathies one finds in the primitive characters of whose who, like savages, are impulsive, obey only their appetites and can only be checked through fear or force.

Such men drive through life at full speed, the way they drive their motor cars. And in the present instance the story was told how one day driving his racing car Vicentico had crashed into that of Don Guancho and been severely scolded by his father. Now that his elder brother was dead of influenza and with the other « heirs to the crown » too young to matter, Vicentico felt more than ever his anomalous position. It was to increase his importance in the eyes of the public, that, on being appointed Inspector of the Army he had set up a petty court of his own and displayed his mistress « La Perla » on the balcony of a brilliantly illuminated house facing the fashionable square of Altadragia in the most aristocratic quarter of Caracas. His receptions, which resembled orgies in more than one respect, were attended by a certain section of the local intelligencia and his followers among the officers and society folk. He also received,

serious backing from all those opposed to Don Guancho. These satellites fanned Vincentico's animosity towards his uncle declaring that the latter's existence formed the one serious obstacle that would prevent his taking over eventually the authority exercised by Gomez the Elder. Meanwhile the President calmly watched a situation develope which he was unable to control either as a father or as a head of the clan, a situation which was the direct outcome of his policies while at the same time it threatened the future safety of the members of his own family which he had constantly sought to favor. Never had the son of a President of the Republic of Venezuela so openly adopted the attitude of direct successor to his father. It was not by inherited merit that Vincentico put forward his claims but by virtue of dynastic authority. And that authority, that dynasty, had neither pragmatic reasons for existence nor traditional antecedents. It had been born of a mad thirst for power on the part of a savage despot who was precipitating his nation towards inevitable catastrophe accompanied by domestic and family conflict.

Such was the situation of Vincentico Gomez at the time of which I am now writing. Indirectly abetting him in all his actions we find Marquez Bustillos, also desirous of proving his devotion to the tyrant's cause on account of certain private matters and unfavorable reports of his past attitude which had recently reached the ears of old Gomez. In less than a week Bustillos accomplished much. By his orders over a hundred civilians and officers were arrested and imprisoned. He personnally was present when the prisoners were questioned — and tortured. Orders were given to have some of the alleged conspirators who had escaped to the provinces followed up and brought back to Caracas. Thanks to inhuman tor-

tures inflicted on the unhappy victims certain confessions partly true, partly false, were wrung from them. The importance of all this was exaggerated and efforts were made to involve in the affair the name of the greatest possible number of people in order to prove to Gomez the extent of the danger from which he had been rescued, that his life had been in danger, and that tortures as dreadful as those he practised on his enemies had been planned for him.

During this period a series of ridiculous and brutal outrages took place in Caracas. For instance there was the case of Jose Abreu, who, in the days of Castro, had given Eustoquio Gomez, the assassin of Mata Illas, the maximum sentence and had since been annoyed under any conceivable excuse. Abreu was arrested in the office of a lawyer where he had sought refuge, beaten, handcuffed and dragged off to prison as though he had been a dangerous criminal. At the same time a young man named Jorge Luciani, was arrested, accused of having pasted up some political posters that had made their appearance, the same treatment was given to Dr Jose Juliac<sup>1</sup> «because he had bowed to Abreu». Already General Pablo Giuseppi Monagas «the last link connecting us with civilization» and Dr Aquiles Iturbe were behind the bars. The two men had been attacked for different reasons. In the case of the former his activity in connection with the anti-Gomez movement was merely suspected, while in regard to the latter the intrigues he had personally carried on against the regime were known. The prominent position in local politics which Monagas and Iturbe held made their arrest an event of extreme significance.

(1) Venezuelan historian who has for several years been living as an exile in New York.

In the entire policy of repression those who directed it sought primarily to satisfy their personal ends. In the case of Marquez Bustillos his purpose was to efface any effect produced by his luke-warm attitude, during the influenza epidemic, while young Gomez seized the opportunity to establish his claim to be considered the logical successor to his father by proving that the supporters of Don Guancho were responsible for the spread of such a movement in the capital by not taking the proper steps to suppress it. At the same time Vicentico was delighted to be able to be revenged on Caracas for the disdain the city had shown towards the cowardly tyrant during the epidemic and the alarm Gomez had felt in finding there an opposition to his pro-German policies. To be sure the reports which were presented to the supreme master were based on testimony of somewhat doubtful value since they were generally obtained by secret revelations secured from miserable stool-pigeons, or torn from the lips of men suffering unmentionable tortures. Such as they were however they proved thoroughly satisfactory and we find in them that same «unanimity» which was displayed by the boards of local aldermen.

In spite of the terrible experiences of the past, in spite of knowing a good deal of what was being planned against us, in spite of seeing every day people being arrested who were involved in the conspiracy and others who had nothing to do with it, we refused to lose hope. We realized that the government was striking in the dark, that so far it had no certain information on which to act. Consequently we considered it best to seem calm and at ease, to wait for the tide to turn, to gather up what fragments of our work the activities of the police might overlook and, above all, to proceed, with the sacred patience of the indus-

trious ant, to rebuild what had been destroyed. Some of the leaders of the movement had left the city and were in hiding. Among them was Pimentel, Job Pim as we called him. Pim's refuge was the estate of a sympathizer who had given me the key. I took him there in a carriage, got him settled and implored him not to go out. The imprisonment of his brother Captain Pimentel had affected him deeply. He assured me that nothing mattered to him any more and that he wished it was over for good and all. I argued with him and showed him that patience and an assured bearing might enable us to carry matters off and leave us in a position to make another attempt before very long. Pim seemed convinced and promised that he would remain in his hiding place.

The following morning I went to the newspaper office and he telephoned from where he was.

« Anything new ? » he inquired.

« Nothing so far. But be sure and stay where you are, » I replied. The idea that he might be taken prisoner while in this state of nervous depression worried me both on his account and -I admit- on my own.

My advice was not followed. Pim left his hiding place. With leisurely steps he strolled down to the Prefecture accompanied by the manager of the printing plant where his paper was brought out, to keep an appointment which the Prefect Carvallo had given him. Once he had crossed the threshold Pim and his companion were not allowed to leave the premises. When they asked the reason the reply was that an investigation into their recent activities was being made and it might be necessary to ask them a few questions.

That night when I asked Tirado Medina, one of the employees at the prefecture, whether there were any

serious reasons back of Job Pim's arrest he replied in a perfectly natural manner, « Nothing special. Like his brother he's supposed to have been mixed up in some military intrigue. They are afraid if they don't lock him up he'll talk too much. »

Tirado left a few moments later after again assuring me that as far as « Jobito » was concerned there was nothing to worry about. Leoncio Martinez, one of the other men on the paper, had stayed at home on account of ill health .From Eduardo Coll Nunez, the manager of the Bolivar Printing plant, we, Antonio Jose Calcano Herrera, the director of the Pitorreos and I, who was the only member of the staff still at large, learned that Carvallo had issued orders to « suspend » the publication of the paper. Neither the manager of the print shop nor Herrera had had anything to do with the conspiracy, which was the real reason for the Prefect's taking this step. The dislike for this comic and satiric paper, which might be compared to the French « Charivari » in its best days, was general in official circles because it was considered a center of dissatisfaction.

I felt distinctly uneasy when I left the Prefecture. I felt sure that neither Pedro Manuel Ruiz nor any of the other prisoners who knew anything about the conspiracy would say a word. They would be able the less likely to speak as they would know that any partial confession would immediately implicate the man who made it and be used against him. Nor was there any need to fear that there was any evidence against me or those who had taken any active part in the movement but had not made themselves conspicuous in any of the different demonstrations in which some of the hot heads of the party had indulged. In this connection I recalled how one of those firebrands, who flamed up whenever there was no real danger, had

upbraided me recently because we, the « intellectuals » were merely passive spectators of what was going on. I stared at him and smiled. I have no use for this type of agitator whose effective action is limited to shouting and mouthing fine sounding phrases. These are one of the afflictions of this decadent age.

My self-appointed champion of Freedom—there being not the shadow of any person connected with the forces of law and order visible at the moment, refused to let me off so easily. Pale with emotion and positively spitting patriotic fervor he exclaimed :

« But they have violated the Constitution. They have outraged the spirit of Democracy. They have actually arrested Juliac. Something must be done immediately. »

« Yes there are two things to be done. One is keep one's mouth shut and the other is not to get drunk on words.

Between half past eight and nine o'clock on the evening of January 19th I went out with two of my friends to the Cirque Metropolitain. One of my companions left us at the Place San Pablo, now known as Place Bermudez. The other man, Coll Nunez, went on with me. The hall crowded with working people, looked somewhat like a cheap, popular movie-palace. It was there, in public, that we were in the habit of meeting, picking up the latest bits of news and passing them on to one another while strolling about in an apparently casual manner. While I had been at dinner word had come that some of the prisoners under torture had made serious statements. In fact several friends had warned me to leave my hotel and go into hiding. But I felt that I had a duty to perform first. I wished to warn the others involved in the affair, workmen, fathers of families, who expecting me to tell them if matters became serious

and if they had to get under cover. I felt that I should be the last to seek concealment. At any rate the fact that I was arrested would prove a danger signal to others and insure their safety.

Hardly had Nunez and I entered the first door on the left side of the building and walked a few feet into the vestibule when Prefect Carvallo, carefully gloved in grey and with a pleasant smile, advanced to meet us. He held out his hand.

« What a piece of luck, I just was wondering if I would see you. There is something I want to speak to you about but, » he went on calmly indicating the crowd all around us, « this is not the place for a talk. My carriage is outside. Please step into it. »

Naturally this farce did not fool me for an instant. A glance showed that we were in the midst of a group of plain-clothes detectives. One of them was particularly well known to me. He was a poor devil called Casanova, a notorious police spy, who had been shadowing me for several days and was all the more easy to identify on account of an enormous and very hairy mole. The sight of it always reminded of one of the curly mustaches of Marquez Bustillos. Tonight although Casanova was supposed to look like a man-about-town he had forgotten to shave his capillary decoration.

Continuing his comedy Carvallo politely helped me into the carriage, which was a victoria drawn by two horses, and sat down beside me with Coll Nunez opposite us. He chatted along amiably, addressing his remarks to both of us and seeking to convey the impression that « the whole thing was nothing but a lot of gossip », whereas he was in a position to tell us some really interesting news and would do so shortly. As he talked I noticed that there were two men on the box beside the coachmen and that we were fol-

lowed by two motorcyclists and another carriage,

As we drove along Coll and I remained calm, replying quietly and in a faintly ironic tone to the chatter of Carvallo. As I have already said he dislikes intensely having to play a part of this kind. One can tell this by his gestures, his glances, the kind of ill assumed cordiality with which he seeks to hide his irritation.

A few moments after the victoria had stopped outside the police barracks a swarthy faced man with a moustache as black as the paint on the carriage came to meet us. We passed in front of the guard-house where seven eight gendarmes were dozing lazily. We entered one of the waiting-rooms. There the Prefect, standing up very straight, informed us that we were under arrest.

« By whose orders and on what grounds ? » I asked him.

« By orders received from my superiors. They ordered... I mean I was told... I should say they wished me... » he stammered awkwardly.

« At any rate you have had orders. That's the main thing », I said to help him out.

The Chief of Police Perro Garcia was seated at a little table. A moment before Carvallo has said to me speaking of Edouardo Coll, « Tell him to go into another room » Before Coll had time to do so Carvallo asked « What are the names of the reporters on the « Pittoreos ».

« Mr Francisco Pimentel, Mr Leoncio Martinez ».

I understood the reason for the question and admired the promptness with which Coll replied. Evidently these were the two men whose names were supposed to be given in case of emergency. Coll has so often seen the paper he was on suspended that he has acquired a « police-court manner ». In the present instance

he knew just how to treat Carvallo and turn aside dangerous questions. If for instance some one showed him an editorial attacking the government he would open his eyes in amazement and declare « I know nothing about that, I'm only the printer. And anyway I can't see that there's anything to make a fuss over ».

This is how he has managed many a time to keep his printing plant open and prevent the authorities from breaking up his presses and throwing the type out of the window.

I remained alone with Pedro Garcia. As in the case of Coll he asked me to hand over to him any valuables I might have about my person. These included my cuff-buttons, my watch, my loose change.

« Any weapons » he inquired.

A policeman stepped forward ready to search me. I stopped him with a gesture. For several days I had been carrying in my trousers, pocket a little dagger with a short blade and an ivory handle. This I took and lay on the table.

Pedro Garcia slipped the knife out of its sheath then put it back and nodded his head significantly as he did so. Next he signed to me that I was to follow a gendarme who led the way upstairs and conducted me into one of the officers' rooms at the end of the corridor on the first floor. There I went to sleep. There I saw the dawn of January 20 touch the yellow walls and fall into the deep courtyard from which rose a medley of noises. There were yells, the banging of doors, the thumping of broom-sticks, the ribald songs of drunken men. In short the lock-up, the « jug », the cess-pool of society. It is over this spot, well known to the pimp, the whore, the thief and the « broken men » of all sorts that Pedro Garcia exercises his authority without restraint or check of any kind. It is there that he orders men and women to be

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beaten, throttled, tortured in a hundred ways. His inventive gifts along these lines and those of some of hiscelebrated henchmen, such as Pedro Gonzales, Eugenio Castillo known as « Horse's head », and the rest have given the place an evil, loathsome reputation. It, does not matter what the offense may be for which a man is thrown in here, the highway robber and the well-bred lad out on a lark get the same treatment, so do also the parricide and the political prisoner. It's part of Garcia's famous system. And the system works.

Every few minutes men passed my door on their way to another room where they would change their hats, their clothes and their faces but, unfortunately, not their souls. They were the police spies about to go on duty in the city. The policemen who had slept in the beds n xt to mine began to get up. They puffed and grunted already tired,though their day's wok had notyet begun. One of them offered me a cup of coffee another a cigarette. But the guard at the door kept, his eye on me. Could I go down stairs ? No I must remain in this room. Some orders was given in a gruff voice, the room emptied itself. The attitude of the gendarmes on duty, who an instant before had treated me tolerantly seemed to have changed. They refused to look at me. They declined to reply to a remark I made. One of them said curtly, « You are in close confinement. Do you understand that ? If there is anything you want you must ask that gentleman for it ».

« That gentleman » being the gendarme who acted as sentinel and walked up and down between the two doors.

I wanted many things. A blanket for instance, for I had suffered cruelly from the cold as I lay on the wretched straw mattresses in the drafty room. I was

hungry and my thirst had by no means been quenched by the single glass of water I managed to obtain. I wanted to get word to my hotel for them to send me my luggage in case I should have to stay here any length of time. I asked for these things. And received no answer.

I glanced about the vast room divided by a wooden partition from a similar one which probably was of the same size and used for the same purpose. There seemed to be a great deal of activity going on among the policemen. Those in my room were busy brushing their uniforms, shining their shoes. A word here and there which I managed to pick up gave me a clue to what it was all about. That day, January 20, the Governor Don Guancho was to present his report to the municipal council and all the enthusiasm that the city fathers and hired police force would be called on to display was hardly enough to properly solemnize such a great occasion. The secretaries, appointed by his brother drew up most amazing speeches for Don Guancho to deliver under such circumstances. For instance when mentioning that some streets have been repaired, the drains inspected, the houses in certain districts renumbered, that the parks are green and that the police are wearing longer drawers Don Guancho feels obliged to refer to Herbert Spencer, to quote Louis XIV and Bolivar, to speak of his brother as « the noble, lion-hearted general » and bring in some remarks about « the universal conflagration ».

Taking advantage of the agitation which this solemn event provoked an officer of the police department entered the room and, having spoken to the sentinel, laid a roll of blankets on one of the beds saying rapidly as he did so.

« Some one brought this for you. The hotel has been told to send you over your meals. »

I opened the package. It contained cigarettes and sweets. My family was not in Caracas at the time, my friends were doubtless panic-stricken over what was happening, all my life I have seldom encountered anyone who took pity on me. Who could have thought of me under such circumstances ? With all the attention of a prisoner I examined the sack containing the candy, the paper in which the cigarettes were wrapped. In one corner a woman's nail had scratched some letters : *Brale*.

I understood-and I was overcome with admiration. The word meant so much to me... and so little. It was one of those expressions, one of those catch-words that are born in a moment of pleasure, that have an intimate personal significance known only to those who coin them *Brale*... the word brought, it all back to me. The episode, banal and shortlived, one of a hundred such that had passed during the dear, dead days of my vanished youth. I was no anchorite, I lived and loved. Chance love, fleeting love, here today and gone tomorrow. And of such an instant had come this act of gratitude, of affection. *She* had not forgotten and, with a soul braver than that of any man, had sent this token to me in my hour of need. On the hill of Calvary the mystic painters of the XVI th century have placed a woman. And that woman was a woman of the streets.

Suddenly there was a noise in the corridor. A man entered the room hurriedly. As he did so his hat fell off. Behind him came a gigantic policeman with a hostile expression. The policeman motioned to his companion to pick up the hat and throw it on one of the beds. Then he said, « Sit down ».

The new arrival was Torres Abandero. We had met a few days before at a saloon next to the newspaper office. I understood he had just been arrested. He

wished to speak to me. I pointed to the sentinel and to the wooden partition through the interstices of which we were probably being watched.

Food was brought to us and we ate a cordial meal talking about unimportant matters, about books and all sorts of things that had nothing to do with the position in which we found ourselves. Later our common misfortunes were bring us very close together till the day when death separated us forever. I am not sure whether the man who had brought Abandero in was Pedro Gonzales or Eugenio Castillo. At any rate he was a coward and a wretch. He treated his prisoner with that stupid insolence such beings display to men of better class than themselves. I tried to make my companion forget what he had just been through by telling stories. He in turn spoke with a profound emotion about Gabriel Muñoz, that distinguished negro poet whom I admire so greatly. Later with a touching and almost boyish pride, he showed me a hiding place in his overcoat in which he had stowed away twenty-five pesos « in case anything might happen to us » and which his guards had overlooked when they searched him.

At eight o'clock an officer came by and whispered to the sentinel. I caught a phrase of what was said. « ...as he's going to take a trip « down under ». « A former unpleasant experience had taught me what that meant. To go « down under », was to go to the prison of La Rotonde. I did not say anything to Torrez Abandero in order not to disturb him. Which one of us was going to take that journey ? A long slow hour went by. We had made up our minds to try and go to sleep. It was about half past eight and we had been lying down only a few moments when the gigantic black policeman approached my bed.

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Knowing of old how valuable such things are in prison I arranged to do up my belongings in a blanket. While the orderly was carrying out my scanty luggage I said good-bye to Torres Abandero who, sitting up on his bed, watched the scene silently. The next time I saw him months later, he was only a shadow of his former self. He had become a wretched skeleton of a man, his body covered with sores, who dragged himself about with his chains. Later still I was destined to hear his ravings as death approached, and the long agony of his death-rattle.

My departure took place rapidly and quietly. Pedro Garcia was in the office down-stairs. He handed my guard a closed envelope containing my money and other valuables. Like the night before he said to me, « Follow those gentleman ». This time his voice was gruff with anger and I felt that he had to make an effort not to insult me. What had taken place in the meanwhile ? My indignation of the day before had changed into a sort of ironical, disdainful politeness towards these rascals who dared to arrest, search and imprison me and who took such a profession seriously. In spite of the tragic elements in the situation I could not help thinking there was something farcical about it. All this appearance of brutality is only an annoying method they use to keep their positions and earn their living. The prison warder who accompanied me had my fate enclosed in a weighty envelope which Pedro Garcia handed him as we left.

Once more we entered a carriage. The last glimpses I had of the city were the lights of the tramway on Avenida Sur, the dark facade of a wing of the Federal Palace, some little trees and a group of gendarmes.

I was placed in the back of the carriage. Two policeman occupied the little seat in front and completely,

screened me from both sides of the street. Another policeman climbed on the box. One of those seated opposite me pretended to look at the road, the other, the famous « Horse's Head », kept his eyes fixed on me in a sinister fashion. I watched him also. It was clear that he did not deserve his nickname. To apply it to him was an insult to a noble quadruped. His face is that of one of morons described by Lombroso, he has enormous jaws, the eyes of a tartar. No animal has that expression in its eyes. People familiar with the member of the pig family which we call a « baba » and which is to be found on the plains of Venezuela will recognize in its flattened skull, with its two protuberances in front and the nightmarish jowl, a perfect resemblance to this notorious criminal.

The carriage rolled on through the darkness. It rolled on towards my fate, towards a torture chamber perhaps, or perhaps towards death...

Those who have never experienced such emotions, who do not know the force of character necessary to resist the grinding, crushing round of weeks, month and years of monotonous, endless suffering, but who nevertheless dare to speak lightly and even ironically of « political » prisoners, will never understand with what disdain we regard the spectacle of their craven, comfortable lives.

Now and then I caught a glimpse of lights as we drove along. I heard the clanging of a tramway. An automobile painted passed us. From the distance sounded the call of a street hawker, the laughter of a prostitute. At length the carriage stopped. We got out. Our way led through the guard room of the Rotonde. The walls were painted yellow and pierced with loopholes and small windows. The place resembled a barracks, an inn, and a prison. An officer in a guttural voice cried « Attention ! » Over the second

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door-way was one of those hypocritical signs that are put up by those who erect poor-houses, hospitals and prisons, « Hate crime, pity the man who commits it ».

As we passed a newly enrolled member of the police exclaimed,

« They are still coming along in all their swell clothes. »

« And you, poor devil », I replied, « you are nothing but a poor slave to whom they have given putties and a gun. »

The officer interrupted us harshly. Later I recalled the bitterness with which the boy had spoken. What a sordid satisfaction it must have been to this child of the slums to see gentlemen fallen into this inferno. It was the spirit of an unconscious Socialist that those cruel, stupid words expressed, the suffering and rage of the outcast. Poor chap.

I was left in a low-roofed room where there were two benches and a small table. After I had been there a little while a young, pleasant mannered man came in and spoke to me, making notes of my replies on a pad.

« Your name ? Your age ? Your profession ? And » he added with a smile, « the reasons for your arrest ? »

« Put down — anything you like... »

He laughed and offered me a cigarette. I sat down again and waited for something to happen. Five or ten minutes passed. A short man dressed in a white suite so carefully pressed and creased that it seemed made out of paper, appeared. He wore a panama hat with a deep fold in the center. His skin was dark and swarthy and his expression was severe. He had a scanty moustache and spoke in a low, querulous voice.

« Come this way... », he said.

We went down a gallery, then through a corridor,

Another short man in uniform wearing his cap on the back of his head came to meet us. He was old, fat, and good-natured. A young and servile looking man accompanied him. I was obliged to jump through the opening of a barred gate. Beyond this was a low, vile smelling room with a straw mattress in one corner. Here I was searched. The man in uniform treated me in an off-hand manner. He made me give him my suspenders, my necktie, my garters, my shoe-strings and my narrow leather belt. While I was doing this he told me that he was too « in confinement ». He was employed to take these articles away from each new prisoner. When I expressed my astonishment that we are deprived of such innoffensive articles he explained :

« You see it's this way. Every now and then one of the prisoners loses his nerve and commits suicide, generally by hanging himself. That's silly though. The great thing, buddy is to take things easy and not worry. Is there anything you want ? »

As my thirst was still unquenched I asked him for some water. He brought it and as he handed it to me said cordially : « You don't need to be scared. The jug belongs to me. »

He left me alone for a moment and then came back with the little man who had been waiting outside for these various formalities to be finished. I followed them down another corridor. The little man in the paper suit walked ahead.

Later I found out that this person, who seemed to have made his clothes out of a visiting card, and who, had such a taciturn expression was called Santiago Porras... or rather « Colonel Porras ». He was another victim of the Gomez system, another unfortunate turned from a man into a machine, whose duty it was to lead prisoners about and see them properly chained

up. It was he who was supposed to pass on the orders of the « General » to Carmelo Medina, an acolyte who enjoyed the full confidence of his superior. The other member of the « high command » at La Rotonde was the secretary Roa. He also had the title of « Colonel ». Rea was another type of man very common in these circles, a combination of a swashbuckler and schoolmaster. When he laughed there appeared in his vulgar countenance two rows of very white, pointed teeth, like those of a shark.

We walked a few steps further. Another gloomy courtyard of which the pavement sloped steeply. Another barred gateway. Another door which creaked as it opened. The short man called : « Nereo » !

A pale, livid creature appeared. He had a retreating forehead and eyes that squinted. In order to pass a second barred gate I am obliged to hop on one leg. At the end of a vestibule about three meters long there appeared a dark well. It resembled a stone tube. In the sides were cut long narrow openings, hung with white rags that remind one of winding sheets. That in what they really are. Each of these marks the opening is a cell. These are twenty-three below, twenty-five above. To reach the upper tier one climbs a dirty, shaking stairway as narrow as that of a church tower.

In the circular courtyard about twelve meters in diameter lay two or three men. Nereo walked ahead of me bearing an enormous hammer. Behind us came two orderlies and I heard the chains theby carried clatter with a sinister noise. When we reached cell n° 41 we stopped. Like some of its neighbors it had no curtain but resembled a black, empty cave, yawning dismally at us. The little man took out a white rag which the orderlies nailed up promptly and said : « Go in. »

Inside it smelt musty and rank, of damp garbage or the open tombs of a forgotten grave-yard. I stumbled over piles of filth. When my eyes became accustomed to the pale light that filtered through the white curtain — only two miserable, feeble lanterns lighted this witches' stadium with its leprous, slimy walls, its nine pillars holding up a roof that partially covers its and its circular passage, that runs around the vaults on the first floor — I noticed that there was a plank fixed against the end wall. The cell was two metres long by one and half metre wide and a little more than two metres high. I stood up against the plank. One of the orderlies removed my shoes. They next placed two iron rings around my ankles. Between these they passed a heavy iron bar. Then came the strokes of the heavy hammer waking the echoes of this dreadful spot as the anklets were riveted into place. The whole thing must have weighed between seventy and seventy-five pounds.

« Try and pull a foot out », ordered Nereo.

As I did not obey quickly enough he pulled one of my feet to see if by bending it I could drag it out of the infamous ring. I tried to conceal the pain he caused me and bit my lower lip with my teeth. I felt mad with rage. As I am still fairly strong, I threw myself on the plank and picking up the pair of *grillos* I made them rattle against the wood.

My companions went out. They nailed the white rag over the doorway from top to bottom. Not a strip of light showed round the edges. As they left one of them, probably Nereo, muttered.

« He's making believe keep his courage up. But down here we treat 'em rough ».

Then silence fell. The faint light filtered in through the white curtain in a funereal manner. The walls were spotted with filth, the plank on which I lay was

rotten with moisture and dampness. Two gigantic spiders walked about on the ceiling signaling to one another with antennae that looked like the arms of a semaphore. Against the wall their shadows assumed gigantic proportions.

I remembered the fate of Andrade Mora. They hung him up by his testicles in the barrack-yard of San Carlos to make him confess the name of his « accomplices ». When for the ninth time the his bonds were undone, he spat a great clot of blood and died. A similar « questioning of the witnesses » was probably going on now. Would I be subjected to the same tortures or would they invent others for me ?

The shadows assume sinister shapes. Dreadful nightmare faces seem to leer and gape at me from right and left. A shiver runs down my spine .My blood turns cold and, as my wave of anger ebbs of away, in its place there steals over me a panic of fear. Blind fear, mad terror, the wretched cowardice of a man whose thoughts conjure up visions that intensify his anguish and that abolish all notion of the passage of time.

« I am going to be tortured tonight. Or perhaps in a few minutes... »

How infinitely I would have prefered death. How willingly I would have dashed my brains out against the walls or cut an artery with a bit of glass. I tried to stand up and look for a broken bottle. But I found nothing The floor of the cell was covered with filth, with leaves from corn-stalks. My throat was raw with thirst, my feet ached with the weight of my iron rings, they chaffed my skin intolerably, I could not take a single step in an upright position. All I was able to do was to crawl about. Little by little however my courage returned. I tried to make myself believe that

all this was merely a trick to frighten me, to intimate me, to make me talk.

Suddenly the curtain was lifted up. The same men came back. Without uttering a word they set about breaking the bar connecting the anklets, thus freeing my feet.

« Come this way. »

My heart beat violently. A repreave had doubtless arrived. I was free. Free.

We went down the corridor, rapidly we descended the stairway, we crossed the dark court-yard. I jumped through the opening cut in the iron grating. But my companions made me turn suddenly to the left... not to the right which led to the open air.

The short man stayed at the door of another cell into which I was now taken. It was rather larger than the one I had just left and angular in shape. In the middle stood a dirty table, one of those tables one finds at an inn and of which the top has grown black with grease and the rubbing of many elbows. Two candles stuck on the wood lighted the group that occupied the room. It included the Prefect, Carvallo, the chief of Police Pedro Garcia and an acting secretary. Further in the background, almost invisible in the shadows stood a tall fellow in shirt-sleeves. His bronzed face was a study in chiaroscuro and was as sharply outlined as that of the man carrying an arquebus in Rembrandt's « The Night Watch ». Opposite him sat Francisco Pimentel, « Job Pim ». He wore neither collar nor shirt and his coat was turned up to his ears. He was pale, haggard and seemed surprised to see me come in. A long rope which ran over a crossbeam in the right hand corner hung from the ceiling. It was doubtless used as an instrument of torture.

The Prefect spoke first. He asked me to sit down.

Next he with typ here and « Thi papers. I look of notes them of ments. er spol might handed « No it is all The « But y who is it to I Sur eyes a of Car the di who v fixed head Sud « Y « Y this P I re look he fin « Y ed m Th denly

Next he handed me a large sheet of paper half covered with typed memoranda, half written by hand, with here and there pencil notes and corrections.

« This was found among Monsieur Pimentel's papers. Do you recognize it ? »

I looked it over carefully. It consisted of a series of notes such as novelists jot down in order to remind them of certain details. I read carefully the pencil comments. Some of them referred to the « tyrant », another spoke of « suppressing the disturbances ». It might easily have been a message in code. Calmly I handed the paper back to Carvallo.

« No, I don't recognize it. Nor do I understand what it is all about. »

The Prefect, with an accent of triumph, replied « But you surely have recognized it. For Mr Pimentel, who is present, assures us that it was you who gave it to him. »

Surprised I glanced at Pimentel who avoided my eyes and did not say a word. The green watery pupils of Carvallo, the shining black globes of Pedro Garcia, the dilated orbits of the man in the back-ground, who watched me as a cat does a mouse, were all fixed on my face. The secretary continued to keep his head down.

Suddenly I decided to ask Pimentel a direct question.

« You said I gave you this paper ? »

« Yes », interrupted Carvallo, « that you gave him this paper and that it was your property. »

I repeated my question. The man I was speaking to looked embarrassed, ill at ease. Still avoiding my eyes he finally answered.

« Yes, perhaps you don't remember it but you handed me this paper a few days ago. »

Thunderstruck by this unexpected remark, I suddenly realized that this statement was probably the

result of tortures to which the poor fellow had been subjected. I looked at the rope, I looked at the distorted features of Job Pim. At that time he wore a small mustache which now seemed to hang loose from the end of his nose. Up to this point I had managed to keep cool, now anger swept over me. My lips trembled and I exclaimed, fixing my eyes on his face, « So you, you, Francesco Pimentel, claim that I gave you this paper and that it belongs to me ? »

« Yes », he answered feebly.

Pedro Garcia who had noticed the embarrassment of Pimentel intervened.

« Moreover the notes are in your handwriting. It is useless to try and deny the charges. You are only wasting your breath. »

The sinister figure in the corner added, « Both men have recognized the paper. »

Without replying to Garcia, I turned to him and said, « I don't know who you are nor can I understand why you should make such a statement »...

The pupils of his cat-like eyes grew still larger. He was about to answer but Carvallo interrupted, « Write something... Let us see a specimen of your handwriting ».

I did as I was told.

« Is that your usual hand-writing ? »

I smiled, entirely at my ease, and replied « It is the only one I have. You can prove this by comparing it with any of my letters or with any manuscripts that may be still on file in one of the newspaper offices... »

The secretary looked at the two hand-writings, mine and that on the sheet of paper and ventured to make the remark, « Pimentel has stated that these notes were written by Pocaterra but they are not in the same hand. »

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Now it was Carvallo's turn to smile grimly while Pimentel moved about nervously and exclaimed : « I don't remember whose hand-writing it was but I know it was he who gave me the paper. »

Pedro Garcia looked at me, then stared scornfully at Pimentel. Everyone understood what had happened. The trick with the paper had failed. The Prefect had probably received orders to find grounds for my arrest and if none existed then to forge some evidence. Neither the secretary, nor Pedro Garcia, not even the man in the corner had the least doubt about this. None of them had anything to say. All remained silent, their eyes fixed on the table. The incident gave me a little more confidence and now it was I who asked Carvallo point-blank, « What is the reason for this stage-setting. It looks like the third act of « *La Tosca* »

As I spoke I pointed to the little table, the rope and the two candles.

He smiled and his eyes grew still more watery. His face was flushed. Probably he had eaten a heavy meal and had drunk copiously. He was still sober but his last trace of conscience had been drowned in alcohol. In spite of the fact than none of the others said a word my remark lightened the atmosphere of this revolting cross-examination. There was a pause which renewed my courage. I could not help thinking that if these men were not obliged to obey some arbitrary, unjustifiable order the battle would be already won. There was no evidence against me. On what ground could they be justified in keeping me under arrest ?

Later I learned that some prisoners whose cells were next to the one in which this scene took place had heard almost everything that was said. I spoke simply and to the point giving the reasons which might explain the actions and strange weakness of character

of such a talented man as Pimentel. I will not record my remarks here.

Carvallo interrupted me, « Mr Pocaterra, although this paper is not really important and though Pimentel, said... declared... stated... » He was at a loss what words to use to conceal his embrassement — « I must tell you at once that we have found out absolutely everything. » Having said this he went on in the characteristically bullying tone which he probably used frequently in such cases.

« It is quite useless for you to try and defend yourself. We know all about what you have been up to, both of you. »

As he spoke he kept looking from me to Pimentel and back again.

« We know they are all mixed up in the game, » added Garcia irritably, « and we've gathered'em all in. It's no use trying to lie out of it. »

This was really going too far. I turned on him.

« Listen to me. I do not know what you are talking about, nor who you have « gathered in ». All that I do know is that last night I was arrested without the least explanation. That I was brought here tonight, that a pair of *grillos* were put on my ankles and that now you declare that I wrote the notes on this piece of paper. All this for reasons I do not understand. If I had written this « copy » I would say so, there is no reason why I shouldn't. If I am mixed up in this matter you are talking about and which you say in so serious do you think I would have been fool enough knowing as I did that other people had been arrested, and having even tried to have them released, to have stayed around myself ? You certainly ought to realize that had I anything to fear I would by this time be on my way to China or to some other far-away spot. We, Venezuelans, know only too well by now

what is liable to happen to us if we fall into your clutches. »

The word China seemed to amuse the rascals and I added, « I do not know a single thing about all this and if I did know I would not tell you. »

Pedro Garcia's face grew black and angry, as it had done a few hours before when he had seen me leave the prison accompanied by his henchman. He would perhaps have given an order, perhaps had me... but Carvallo broke in quickly, « I must inform Don Guancho of all this ».

He went on to tell the secretary to have Pimentel write out his statements on the bottom of the piece of paper and have it send to Don Guancho.

I was somewhat relieved by the thought that, while pretending to defend myself, I had found means of letting Pimentel know that I had not said anything. From the way Carvallo had worded his remarks and the irritable attitude of Pedro Garcia I understood that Pimentel had not yet « spilled the beans » and that he would not be foolish enough to do so now. To be sure the episode with the notes on the paper would fall back on him. His confession must go no further. Consequently when the secretary read aloud what Pimentel had written, namely that it was I who gave him the said paper which belonged to me, I looked straight at him as he about to sign and told him « Be very careful what you are signing. You may be committing a wicked and useless action ».

If he is the noble hearted man I always have thought him to be he must still recall that moment.

But he quietly signed. I shugged my shoulders. The « judges » maintained an embarrassed silence. Garcia looked hard at Carvallo and the glances he cast at me from time to time had become a little less ferocious. The man in the corner grinned, showing wolf-like

teeth. For an instant the human being gained the upper hand of the sleuth-hound, for a moment the drunkard was replaced by the sane-minded man.

While I was being questioned I had risen and was standing with the table between me and Pimentel. Carvallo noticed this and said.

« Sit down, Mr Pocaterra. And write out your statement underneath that of Pimentel. »

« Why should I do this? » I asked unable to control a gesture of repulsion.

« We », and, as he spoke Carvallo pointed to Garcia, « are merely carrying out orders received from our superiors. Sit down and write what you have just said in regard to this paper? »

The secretary with a sigh of relief handed me the pen and pushed the ink-well towards me.

« Write here and then sign. »

I can recall the short sentences I wrote and which may be read if this wretched document still exists in the secret archives of the Prefecture. « I have never seen the paper that has just been shown me. In saying otherwise Mr Pimentel is committing a serious mistake or making a rash statement. » I then I signed.

The secretary took the paper. He compared the hand-writings and said, shaking his head.

« This writing is entirely different from the one on the paper? »

« Very well », answered Carvallo as he got up from the table, « Don Juancho will see it and decide. You can take these gentlemen away. »

« In other words », I retorted, « you, M. le Prefet, assume the responsibility for keeping me a prisoner. »

« Don't lose your temper. The matter is a serious, a very serious one. I am only obeying the orders of my superiors. Don Juancho will decide with « the General » (his brother Juan Vicente). »

As I was about to go out, escorted by the short man dressed in white, I noticed that the sinister looking person in the back-ground rose painfully to his feet. He had a wooden leg, and was probably the *alcade* Carmelo Medina. Placing a hand on the shoulder of Pimentel he forced the latter back in his seat and said to Carvallo who was about to leave the room.

« Leave this little friend of mine here for a few minutes. I have several things I want to say to him » Medina spoke casually but his tone conveyed a subtle menace.

As I left the cell I felt that Pimentel's examination was only beginning. The unfortunate man was probably about to be questioned again, perhaps tortured.

We passed through the court, down the hall-way and up the shaking stairway, that reminded me of the one behind the scenes of a dirty provincial theatre, Nero and his companions accompanied us. We re-entered the filthy cell, the grillos were once more attached to my ankles, the last nails driven into the curtain that covered the only opening of this loathsome tomb. Once more I was chained to the rotten damp plank. Around me there was darkness and night peopled by the sinister rattling of chains in the neighboring prisons.

From far away there comes, clear and distinct, the tolling of the bell in the clock-tower of the nearby cathedral. I feel as though it were ringing for my requiem mass. I am cut off forever from the city, from life, from all humanity. One, two, three, six, eleven strokes peal out. Before me there stretches the dreary prospect of constant pain, unceasing gloom, misery and anguish, mental and physical.

I feel myself sinking into the well of despair. Tonight, tomorrow I know what the next thing will be—the torture chamber. But as though to combat my

apathy, my hopelessness, a new feeling of stoicism stirs in my bosom. I brace myself morally to meet the foe. Chance shall not conquer the vigor of my thirty years. One cannot call what I feel courage exactly, it is hardly moral in its essential quality, it has nothing to do with my brain or mind. It come from some unexplored regions within me, those regions where lurk the forces that allow those who are about to disappear forever to face their fate with equanimity, with a sublime apathy that nature, great and good, pours like a balm upon their troubled hearts from the reservoir of her infinite charity.

Little by little drowsiness comes over me, that daily death, sleep, drops her magic potion drop by drop into my eyes. And like someone who, helpless and resigned lets himself be born out to sea on a great wave, I slip down gently, painlessly, unresistingly into a limitless abyss.

\* \* \*

*January 21, 1919.*

The dull, muffled roll of drums. Trumpets. Fifes. That harsh reveille which is alike in military barracks everywhere. How often have I heard these sounds from a prison cell. At Puerto Cabello, et San Carlos, at the melancholy forts beside the sea... While I am listening to this martial music I catch some secret, terrible messages that are being exchanged between prisoners confined near me. I throw myself to the ground. Forgetting for a moment the chains that bind me fast I try to walk and fall flat on the pavement. My face strikes the floor. When I take my hands from my bruised head and get up again I feel a sticky, tepid liquid trickling between my fingers. I wipe off the blood on the curtain. Meanwhile the voices have continued their tragic dialogue, a dialogue which

allows me to understand the full extent of the infamy that has taken place.

« Yes, » says the voice furthest away, « he had given his word of honor to help us. And he kept it — up to the last minute. He was the officer on duty that particular night. A few moments before the appointed time he told Captain Pimentel that he refused to go on with it...

« Why? »

« He thought it would be best for him not to take part. What is more he decided to betray us. When he informed Pimentel of his change of heart he had already, for several days, been passing on the full details of all that he had heard of our plans. That is why Captain Felix Andrade Mora, who died in the barracks of San Carlos, at La Trinidad, was arrested the night the blow was to be struck. Other officers were also seized at the same time in the other barracks at El Mamey, El Hoyo and the one at the Planta Electrica del Paraiso. They knew exactly how many officers were involved and what each was to do and where to find the conspirators. Some of them were arrested in their beds. »

« Yes, I know about that, » said another voice nearer at hand.

« And I know what they did to them afterwards. Captain Pimentel was hung up eleven times by his testicles. They did the same Major Manuel Maria Aponte, the artillery Lieutenant Julio Hernández, to one of the Parra Etrenas, to Captain Miguel and Second-Lieutenant Betancourt Grillet, and to the cavalry Captain Carlos Mendoza. And now if they are still alive they are either here or out at Villa Zoila to be tortured some more. They also hung up Dr Pedro Manuel Ruiz and a man called Romulo Acuna who was employed at the « Bazar Americain ». 111

« They did the same things to Captain Argimiro Arellano and to Lieutenant Jorge Ramirez, » called out some one else further off.

« And to me too, » added another, almost boyish voice, from a cell close at hand.

« Who are you ? »

« Luis Aranguen Moreno, second lieutenant, Ricardo Corredor, Arturo Mara, and Manuel Mora, the fourteen years old brother of Captain Adrade Mora are also prisoners. He does not know what has become of his brother. Cristobal, the other one of the Parra Entremas, is probably also in prison. So are Badaraquito, Jose Agustin, and Anibal Molina, and mingo Mujica. »

« How many officers did they arrest in all ? »

« Sixteen. A major, seven captains, eight lieutenant and second lieutenants. »

« They hung us up in the court-yard of the Villa Zoila », added another voice.

« Who hung you up ? »

« It was General Vicentico Gomez who gave the order himself. He was there with General Pedro Alcantara Real, lieutenant-colonel Zapata, captain Anselmi, and three lieutenants.

« Yes », went on another voice beside me, « Mendoza, Isea Chuecos and Padron ».

« There were no civilians there ? »

« Only one ».

« Who ? »

« The man with the heavy jaw, he's secretary to the government. »

« Dr Antonio Maria Delgado-Briceno », put in the boyish voice, « he used to be school-teacher in le Tachira and composed waltzes ».

« Soulful melodies, the kind of thing they play at the regimental concerts in the park ? »

« When I was hung up I saw the chauffeur of General Vicentico, a men called Pablo Vicente, looking on. »

« Nobody else ? »

« Nobody else. »

A sound of approaching steps was heard. « The warden's coming » warned one of the speakers.

The voices were stilled. For a few moments all one heard was the sound of steps of some one walking cautiously.

Filled with horror and alarm I lifted up a corner of my curtain with my finger nail. I caught a glimpse of Corporal Nereo, who after casting an uneasy glance towards the upper tiers of cells, walked towards the barred partition. When he was out of hearing I asked hurriedly.

« What is the name of the traitor ? »

« Captain Jose Agustin Pinero », answered all the voices.

## CHAPTER XXI

Nights in Prison. — The rules of the establishment. — *Comie Relief.* — Doctor Carlos Leon. — Some additional details on the life of Nereo Pacheco. — The new cells of Caracas. — Pen drawings. — Garchita, the boy hero. — The druggist Enrique Mejia, the first of the martyrs. — The « joropos, of Nerro. — Rafael Arevalo Gonzales and the candidature of Montes.

*January 1919,*

By this time, according to what the orderlies tell me and from my private information, more than eighty persons have been arrested in Caracas and the suburbs, to say nothing about the rest of the country. Citizens whose names are enough to make anyone smile at the idea that they could have participated in an « anarchist » rising are being ill treated, imprisoned or tortured. Some of the latest arrests are due to the conspiracy among the officers of which we have already spoken and which was betrayed as related above. Other men have been condemned on account of personal animosities and in order to satisfy private revenge. Others again merely because certain officials desired to show their zeal or in order to wreak on helpless beings the fear and anger of Gomez.

It was impossible to sleep the first nights one spent down in these cells. In addition to the cold

cutting weight of the grillos, there were the cock-roaches, the fleas, the unbreathable air, the filth with all its unpleasant accompaniments, hunger with all its attendant ills, for besides the loathing one had to swallow the fetid soup there was the constant fear of being poisoned which made the slightest cramp seem the preliminary symptom of a fatal illness. If one was able to overcome by force of will power one's physical discomforts a still more hideous torture still lurked the background — namely insomnia. Sleeplessness peopled with terror and nightmarish sounds such as the clanking of the chains, shrieks from neighboring cells, or alarming visions of shadowy forms slipping silently along the corridor, pausing here there on some devilish mission, or lurking in the darkness to surprise the delirious mutterings and whispered protests that die away when a warning « sh, sh » runs along the row of cells as the bolt rattles. Or again hoarse moans followed by the sound of savage blows as though some one somewhere was being ill treated.

Every night the same scenes took place. During the day we would lie on the plank or stretch ourselves on the ground in order to escape the assaults of the woodlice. Our heads felt heavy and empty as we painfully tried to measure the passing of the monotonously slow hours. This began at four o'clock in the morning. No sooner had we heard the guards stirring and sound of the reveille being blown in the neighboring barracks than Nereo, who slept in one of the upper corners of the prison, facing the stairway, began his rounds. He saw to it that each of us should be awakened. In order to be sure of this he stopped in front of each door and struck the walls with a wooden club.

« How goes it in there ? »

If the prisoner did not answer, or at least uttered a groan, the warden kept on pounding until he was sure his victim was awake. It would never do to let any of his flock oversleep.

Shortly afterwards the key turned in the grating and the little man dressed in silk paper with his big hat and small features jumped through the opening. Preceded by Nereo he climbed up to our floor. There he made the round of our gallery, went downstairs and made the same inspection of the lower tier of cells. The only difference was that below stairs he lifted the curtain whereas with us the sheet was only raised when someone wished to remark « You are rotting away in there. » A very true remark it was too for, under this regime, we were sure that sooner or later we would literally rot away in one manner or another. The same inspection took place at six o'clock at night, afterwards the visitor locked the gate and went away. The little man was as regular as an alarm clock. During the three years I spent there I only remember once or twice when he failed to appear. Then it was because he was sick. And every night before leaving he stopped in the cell of Carlos Leon who waited for him behind his curtain as eagerly as a fiancé awaits his future bride and when the visitor appeared had always some amusing remark to make to him.

Dr Leon had been confined here for nearly six years. I do not know how long this ceremony of the daily joke had been going on, nor if Leon's stock of stories was inexhaustible or if Porras was easily amused but every night the latter shut the grating with a chuckle and said laughingly.

« Ah that doctor... If you only knew how funny he is. » There were other things funnier still.

In March 1914 Casimiro Vegas, Negron and General

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Norberto Borges were sent to prison. Borges who has a lame leg was still dragging about his irons as best he can eight years later. General Gomez, when he is among friends, is fond of telling the story how Borges when he was hung up by a certain part of his person was unable to retain his urine which ran down all over his face.

« Because the fellow had his legs in the air, don't you know, » remarks the witty general.

On June 5 of the same year, Dr Leon, professor of sociology at the Central University, a lawyer, director of several important business enterprises and former governor of the Federal District under the same Gomez, was likewise thrown into jail. With him were the honorable citizens Vicente Marturet and the young Luis Zuloaga Llamozas. These two were later released, Marturet because he was said to be dying, Llamozas because he had during his confinement contracted the disease which later carried him off while still in the prime of life. Dr Leon, who was heavily ironed had several times been on the point of death. I have always respected him. And this in spite of the attitude he adopted. He had an altogether exaggerated idea of his importance in the sphere of national politics. His airs and consciously superior manner, that of a self-professed « high-brow », had caused him to be much admired by callow students. At heart he is a true patriot. When one deals with him one finds that he is loquacious and benevolent although not particularly sincere.

Nereo never joked. Daily he walked in front of Porras lifting up each curtain but never cracking a smile or relaxing his stern features. He exercised his horrid mandate with a grim conscientiousness. He was as stolid as fate, as inflexible, as sinister as the most incorruptible state executioner. He worked

hard to earn his reward, the escape to Curacao or Trinidad which he had been promised should the court find him guilty of a murder charge, sentence for which was still pending. What must he do to win this reward ? Nothing much, only see to it that those incriminated in the « barracks'plot » disappear with sufficient rapidity.

Consequently, like the good and faithful servant that he was he drew ever tighter the bonds, aided starvation and exhaustion, ill-treated his victims in order to hasten that end which was already so near at hand. Relentless he drews us from our soothing sleep, day and night he was on the alert to prevent those « down below » from communicating with those « up above ». Carefully he inspected the eighty odd empty tin boxes that were given us as platters No spoons went with them to dip out the yellowish water with a couple of pieces of vegetables in it that called itself soup. This « meal » was served us at noon and at three in the afternoon. In the morning we had the same box given us. Then it contained a watery extract of coffee. For bread we had tiny balls of corn-meal called « *hallaquitas* ». Our ration of these was one apiece. Once more during the twenty-four hours we were entitled to receive another similar box filled with water or, as a special concession, or, more likely, with money taken from the prisoner's supply which Medina has confiscated when we were brought in we were allowed to buy a *pimpina* or chamber-pot. Those who cannot afford this luxury had a little earthen saucepan. These were collected once a day — provided Nereo was feeling good-natured. There are some prisoners who were considered sufficiently important to be entitled to two chamberpots. The jailor brought them back emptied but unwashed. For the prisoners who like my-

self had their curtain nailed over the door the food and « toilet articles » were passed underneath.

The guards were also political prisoners who had been released from their chains in order that they might sweep, clean the latrines, bring the prisoners their food and do the other odd chores. Nereo was the only common-law prisoner in our part of the prison. He was our master, who could distribute beatings or favors as he saw fit. No one questioned his acts and he was free to ill treat us as much as he pleased. Which was saying a good deal. Night and day we felt him spying on us.

When the little man with paper suits came to inspect us our jailor told him what he pleased.

« Nº 7 and nº 21 have been quarreling again. Nº 7 called the other man a robber and a bastard. Nº 21 kept answering him all the time 'you're talking about the General'. »

Here when the general was referred to one does not mean Gomez nor don Juancho but Carmelo Medina. This scale of generals begins with the provincial governors and rises with a note of increasing familiarity till it reaches Juan Vicente who is referred as « the old boy .»

I heard the two young officers who were in the series of cells on my left — numbers 38 to 30 or 29, two in each cell and bound by a single pair of grillos, talk about « the General Vicente. » They did not use anymore the diminutive term « general Vicentico. »

One day I heard one of the orderlies who was trying to flatter Nereo say « Here is the soup, general Pacheco. »

The jailor turned on him like a wild beast.  
« Mind you own business. I'm no general. I never stole anything from you. »

Nereo to my mind is the perfect type of murderer. He becomes furious at the idea that any one could take him for a thief. He can kill, he has killed in the past, he is still killing, but commit a theft—that is impossible. He is absolutely honest, utterly sincere. He would not steal a farthing. What he enjoys doing however is rivetting on the chains.

One can hear the pleased tone of his voice when he says the orderlies.

« Step lively there, boys, there's work to be done today. »

When he passes the grating and goes towards the governor's office it means that there's something in the air. At such times he is in the habit of walking up and down glancing though t fullyat the empty cells. If there are none he reflects whom he could particularly annoy by putting some other prisoner in his cell. He always takes special pains to put two people with violently different characters together. For one of the rules of the establishment is that a new prisoner must first be in solitary confinement.

Naturally the reason for this is because solitude increases his sufferings.

The same scene invariably takes place.

« Nereo ! » some one call outside the grating.

« Everyone into their cell, double quick », cries the jailor.

This refers to the prisoners on the lower tier who are allowed out in the court-yard. One hears the sound of clanging chains as those who are in the open hasten to regain their dungeons. The curtains drop and with them falls a terrible silence, heavy with anxiety and uncertainty.

Are old prisoners to be released ? Are new ones being brought in ?

Generally it is the latter. The newcomer jumps

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through the grating and gazes horror-struck at these rags, this sinister inferno. He is led into one of the cells. Three, six, eight, ten strokes of the rivetting iron are heard. The curtain drops. Dorras leaves and Nereo calls,

« You can come out again. »

The latest arrival, ignorant of what all this is about, of what is going on about him, is sick with dread and fear of what may happen next.

The same proceeding takes place when a prisoner is released. In between times there are moans and clamors, which one notices during the first few days of one's confinement and which seem to be uttered by someone undergoing hideous tortures. They are only the nightmares of poor wretches who, even in sleep, cannot escape from the horror that surrounds them. Then too the sinister noises of the irons as any of the prisoners stir echoes weirdly through the silence.

Other groans are heard. They are wrung from a prisoner tortured by agonising cramps who rolls about on the floor seeking relief that is denied him.

Above all this, down from the blue sky flutter a flock of pigeons, the one gracious, lovely thing that greets our eyes in this sink of iniquity. They nest in the tops of the pillars that support the roof and strike with their wings the wooden box which Nereo has prepared for them. Every ten days or two weeks he fetches a ladder, climbs up, captures one or two pigeons and takes them to the governor. They are the « pigeons of Medina. »

A mournful silence settles over the ravished nest. Then little by little one hears new twitterings, new strokes of pigeons, the caressing notes of the mother-pigeons, the feeble cooing of the baby birds...

What lessons we may learn in this hell-hole in

which we lie. All we need to do is lift up our eyes and behold the constantly recurring miracle of how joy follows grief, how life goes on in spite of death and violence.

Sometimes Nereo feels ironically inclined.

« I'll give you a tip, fellows, to-morrow there isn't going to be any water. The supply's been cut off. So you'd better make what you've got last. There probably won't be any more for a couple of days. »

The story is not true. But how are we to know? It might so easily be a fact and not just Nereo's idea of a good joke.

Water is scarce at best and the idea that it may give out makes one all the thirstier.

I feel somewhat bewildered. It seems to me that I am hearing familiar voices. Sometimes the stillness is broken by foot-steps, new prisoners are being brought in. The nights are dreadful, they seem filled with stifled protests, moans, cries of terror, the sound of pitiless questions being repeated again and again.

At about ten o'clock on one of the first morning after I had been brought to La Rotonde I was crouching near the curtain waiting for Nereo to go by. An attack of rheumatism had kept me from closing my eyes all night. Finally he reached my cell.

« Corporal? »

« What's the matter? »

« I'm cold. I had a blanket and even a few clothes with me when I came. They haven't been given back to me yet. »

« A blanket indeed... When you've been here five or six years... »

« But at the citadel of San Carlos, at Puerto Cabello they let us have some. »

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« When were you shut up there ? »

« In the days of Castro, in 1908. »

His voice when he replies is less bitter. One has the impression that for this brutal soul the fact that some one else has already known what it is to suffer is an element in their favor.

« Here it's worse than it was there. You take my word for that, my lad. You'll find out quick enough anyway. »

And he is right. All the savagery, carried to absurd lengths, the cold calculating cruelty, the ferociousness of blood-thirsty beasts have increased with the passage of time. Things have progressed since the days of Castro. Then the prisons were severe. The prisoners were liable to be beaten, to be put under the yoke like cattle, some of them went mad with pain, but at least Jorge Bello at San Carlos gave us something that resembled food to eat. He let us have air, sun-light, water. There was not always a spying jailor at our heels trying to think up some new way to make us suffer. Here it is close confinement with all that that terms implies. In Paris after Napoléon III's Coup d'Etat of December 2nd one of the men locked up at Mazas said « we thought we would go mad. » But in the French prison there was a hammock in which to sleep and a court-yard in which one took exercice for an hour every day. We have read Oscar Wilde's indictment of the English prison system but there is no comparison between his experiences and what we have to put up with. Not all the sufferings recorded in « *De Profundis* » is comparable to what one endures in a single hour at La Rotonde. Nor is it to be compared with what Silvio Pellico described in *Mei Prigioni*. Not in the famous leads of the Grand Ducal palace of Venice nor in the sinister dungeons

of Avignon during the Middle Ages is anything to be found that is the equal of the abject misery in which we wallow.

I cannot eat and if I order anything extra I am charged a fabulous price for it. Prices which will rapidly exhaust the supply of funds I brought with me and which are now in the hands of the governor. When that money is gone — which will be pretty soon at the present rate — I will simply die of hunger. If the extra rations are enough to nauseate a dog what must be « regular chow » be like. Moreover I am frightened of the food that is brought me. I remember that it has been said to contain poison.

I throw dearly bought extra rations away and, having searched the cell, I finally find a bit of nail. With this I open a tiny hole on the curtain and manage to see a corner of the court-yard, a bit of the corridor above me, and the line of cells each with its curtain nailed up like mine which are numbered 38 to 25 on my right and 44 to 48 on my left. Not a corner of the sky. Light falls straight down into the court as it would into a well. And in spite of the sunlight that flickers joyously on the water in the central basin and the miserable stunted trees that struggle upwards from between the cracks in the cement around the basin, the diseased leprous looking walls, the sordid melancholy of the scene has a poignantly dramatic quality. This raw light, this background of a prison wall and the group of prisoners huddled together in one corner might have been pictured by Goya.

At first I cannot recognize a single one of my fellow captives. Yet every one of them is doubtless a person of prominence. Each of these sad beings, trying to catch a ray of sun as they stand upright supporting on their shoulders the rope which enables

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them to lift their enormous chains, was once a man who has at one time or another rebelled against society. Some of them are men about whom little or nothing is known. Some of them are men whom some local intrigue lured to Caracas and buried here forgotten ever since. They have continued to live on, without money, hope or consolation. To support them their comrades in misfortune have heroically shared what little they had. In some cases they became orderlies in order to be at least free from their chains. They are the persons who must obey Nereo's orders. If they only dared they would strangle him. One of them is called Jose de Dios Garcia Mogolon. He has faded blond hair and is gentle and quiet. Another very thin, very silent, very tall, who always looks solemn, is named Manuel Olivares. There is an Indian, Ernesto Carias who has the clear eyes of a child, he is strong and patient, a kind of Saint-Christopher, and Narciso Garcia, restless, short in stature, a former officer of Perez Soto <sup>1</sup>. Garcia has the eyes of an Arab, he is quick in his movements, agile, and always on the lookout for the main chance. Another man has a leaden complexion, a bitter manner and seems very ill. He is called Caricote and there is an evil legend told about him.

Juan Milano is also one of the orderlies. He has the serious demeanor of a wily peasant. He carries his burdens as he does his cans of preserves with the utmost prudence. If anyone annoys him he mutters an obscenity. He was brought here by order of « don Juancho » and at the request of an influential man with whom he had a personal feud. And that was eight years ago...

(1) A notorious homosexual who is also a brutal swashbuckler at present President of the State of Zulia.

Nereo has a particular « favorite ». By that he means an orderly he prefers to torture. As soon as there is anything particularly nasty to be done he shouts « Garc-i-ita. »

A boy of fourteen answers the call. His name is Jose Maria Garcia. He was born in Guarenas. Formerly he was employed in the Las Amadores drug-store which belonged to M. Pedro Bastardo. One day Garcia was delivering an order for a wholesale quantity of goods for this drug store when he happened to pass by the house of M. Antonia Pimentel. Noticing that smoke was coming out of one of the window Garcia stopped. An explosion took place. Several fragments of glass wounded him in the abdomen and cut his hands. People rushed up and a policeman arrested him, took him first to the police station, from there to hospital. Four days later the wounded man was taken to police headquarters and thence to the Rotonde where they set about torturing him to make him confess that M. Bastardo had sent him to Pimentel's house with a bomb. As he continued to deny this they proceeded to hang him by his feet, head downwards, and resort to other and more dreadful tortures. His tormentors were however unable to make the poor lad admit anything. He kept on insisting that he was innocent. For some time he was forced to wear two pairs of grillos. Now he acts as orderly. Since the fatal day, September 16, 1914, when at seven o'clock in the evening he happened to stop in front of Pimentel's house just as the bomb went off, the unfortunate boy, constantly exposed to cruelty of all sorts, has led the most wretched existence imaginable. This has continued to such an extent that now not only has he lost his health but he is gradually losing his mind as well.

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Pimentel belongs to the inner circle of Gomez' intimate friends. He is the latter's partner and associate. Extremely rich he lives a life of ease and luxury. People say he is kind hearted...

Garcita tries to revenge himself on fate by defying the anger of Nereo. The latter beats him on any and all excuses. Frequently it is because the orderly has dared to give his scanty meal or that of one of the other, stronger prisoners to those who are suffering the most keenly from the pangs of hunger. These are generally the « soldiers », in other words the officers confined in cells 38-29. When Nereo strikes Garciita, the brave, defenseless lad, white-faced and resolute spits at him and exclaims ;

« Strike me some more Nereo, Strike me some more ».

A storm of protest, cries of anger and curses for the cowardly jailor, go up from all the cells. But they do not make the savage stop. It is only when he is tired of beating his victim that Nereo ceases his attack. The boy crouching down to avoid the rain of blows from his tormentor's club glares at him red-eyed with rage and jeers.

« Keep on striking me Nereo. Why are you stopping ? »

Another man we call the little lunatic. His name is Mejia and he was formerly a druggist. He has passed beyond the stage of suffering. Thin, with protruding eyes he goes about committing those beastly actions which lunatics indulge in but so evidently unconscious of his surrounding that one cannot either be angry with nor laugh at him. Nevertheless certain nights Nereo beats him. The madman becomes excited and utters foolish words. Then Nereo applies the muzzle ». Do you know what is meant by « muzzling » a man ? It is simple enough. One puts a rope around the victim's head, a piece of wood is passed

through the rope so one can tighten it. When the stick is twisted the rope presses on the back of the head and the corners of the mouth is such a way that the jaws become rigid. The victim's tongue remains underneath, pulled out to full length and held firmly in place by the rope. The prisoner's hands have been tied so he can do nothing but utter animal like moans as the pain grows greater and greater. He writhes this way and that until, at last, exhausted by pain he falls to the ground and lies there, not even able to utter a human sob but grunting and whimpering like a stricken beast. The agony that is reflected in his eyes is something indescribable.

Mejia, the little lunatic, was tortured like this ceaselessly for several days. Naturally he received no nourishment of any kind, finally he died, a pitiful heap lying in one corner of the prison courtyard. Nereo had complained that Mejia's ceaseless monologues kept him from sleeping. That was why he « muzzled » the lunatic. After that it was we who could not sleep until the end came. When it was all over they sewed him up in a piece of cloth.

Shortly afterwards the orderlies carried out the body through the same hole through which the food was passed in. Nereo took his harp and sitting down in the passageway by the entrance ran skilful hands over the strings and executed a rich, sensual « *joropo* ». Some of this acolytes gathered around him. Next he played a waltz and ended his performance with a « *tonada* ».

The sun falls directly into the courtyard. The spot where the dead man lay has been scrubbed with a disinfectant.

The same group of prisoners stands about in the center of the courtyard.

I probably know all of them. In the past they were friends of mine, fellow seekers after the same ideals. And now from my post of observation back of the curtain, which later on came to be known as the «periscope», I study them closely and try and identify them.

At one end of the line, almost hidden by the pillar next to cell n° 5, which is the one where he is confined, I see a face which suddenly seems familiar. The head droops and the pointed beard is already growing grey. With his eyes fixed on the sunny cement floor he remains motionless and thoughtful as he warms his legs against the chains. It is Arevalo Gonzales <sup>1</sup>. A criminal of the lowest type. A dangerous and depraved felon. One of the most dangerous creatures to be found in all Venezuela whom fortunately for the safety of society, the December *caudillo* caught in its noose. His despicable crime, for which it may be added the hardened criminal has never expressed the least repentance, was as follows. On Friday, July, 1913, he dared to print in the columns of his newspaper *El Pregonero* (n° 3768) the announcement that the lawyer Felix Montes was a candidate for election as President of the Republic.

The same day Gonzales was brought to the Rotonde and put in irons. His fellow criminal, Dr Montes went from hiding place to hiding place and finally fled the country.

One trembles with horror and disgust at the thought that such men as Gonzales and Montes should

(1) Well known newspaper writer, a man of integrity and uncompromisingly hostile to tyranny in any form. Has now been a prisoner for fourteen years and is still confined in the citadel of Puerto Cabello.

have dared premeditate and execute such a foul crime of « lèse-gomezism ».

In 1915 or 1916 a person who was moved by the plight of the family of Arevalo Gonzales, consisting of his wife, a son and four daughters, all of whom were financially dependent on their father, went to see Gomez and begged him to release of the editor.

« I will let them all out some day or other », replied the General « except Roman Delgado; Uzcategui and Arevalo Gonzalez. »

« Is Arevalo as deeply implicated as the two others ? »

« No, he is not. But his case is different », Gomez replied evasively and with an air of impatience, but it was on account of him that we had to invent the war with don Cipriano and all the rest of it.

## XXII

The tragedy of the two priests. — How they died. — Poison at work. — From Locuste to Juan Vicente. — What became of the Delgado-Chalbaud Conspiracy. — Beyond good or evil. — Seen through tortured eyes. — The chain of instincts and its links. — Who is the traitor, who does he betray. — How « the good and kind man » had pity on Gil Fortoul. — Seen from my Periscope. — A cure for obesity-Some comments from my neighbors. — Father Mendoza and Father Monteverde. — The little brother of Andra Mora. — Delirium. — Starvation and its nightmares-Some prisoners are moved. — Enter Juliac-Father Lobera and his twenty-four hour confinement. A literary form of delirium tremens. — In the shadow of the desk. — The death of Ramon Isidore Rendon. — A hint for socialists. — The final joropo.

*February-March 1919.*

Another tidal wave of arrests swept over Caracas and drove everything before it as far as the corner of *del Hoyo*. On November 13, 1915 a priest, Evaristo Ramirez, one of the deacons attached to the metropolitan chapter, his brother-in-law Mr Jose Maria Franco, Mr Francisco Rivero Saldivia, Mr Eduardo Porras Bello a newspaper man and former editor of the Caracas paper *El Tiempo*, the parish priest of La Trinidad Tomas Monteverde, Dr Francesco Paula Reyes, Lieutenant-Colonel Carlos Garcia Carvallo — who died the following year — Mr Dionisio Borges, Dr Arnaldo Morales former Minister of

Education and Finance who was freed a few days later, the poet Ildemaro Urdaneta, Colonel Ponte Urbaneja and General Antonio Ramos were among those arrested. The latter was freed quickly on this particularly occasion. Now he has just been brought in again and placed in one of the cells opposite mine.

Two years later the priest Dr Regulo L. Franquis, a deacon and influential member of the metropolitan chapter was caught on the beach of La Guiara as he was on the point of fleeing the country. He was tied up, severely beaten and dragged barefoot across the mountains to La Rotonde. Other arrested at the same time included Antonio Pio Garcia, R. Porras Ortiz, Pedro Bosque Fernandez, and a certain Ventura Hernandez. Hernandez was imprisoned because he had helped conceal Father Franquis and the others because they had been conniving at his escape. These gentlemen were released on June 13, 1919.

At the time of these arrests M. Gomez Ordaz was also taken into custody. He and Dionisio Borges were confined in the section of La Rotonde reserved for common-law criminals. The same thing happened to several other men indicted for political offenses. Antonio Pio Garcia was again arrested on January 12, 1918 and is still in confinement. An officer, whose name I have not been able to secure, died at Police Headquarters about the same time as a result of the treatment he had received there.

The two priests Franquis and Ramirez died of poison, the former on December 16, 1917, three months after he had been thrown into jail, the latter a few days later on January 23, 1918. Of all those who had been involved in this affair only four survived. Porras Bello was a mong these survivors. This

was already very inconsiderate of him and by way of aggravating his offense and in spite of the seventy-five pound *grillos* he was obliged to drag about with him, this hardened reprobate managed to break the rules of the establishment. He actually supplied remedies and food to those who were ill. He also washed their sores and nursed their attacks of fever, to say nothing of securing, by some trick known only to himself, certain comforts from Governor Mediana from whom it was as difficult to obtain a dose of bicarbonate as an ounce of pure radium. During the influenza epidemic when practically all the prisoners were ill, Bello, ruffian that he was, connived with Arevalo his accomplice to attend to the washing of the seventy-odd bedpans of his companions. Such criminals always find acolytes to aid them in executing their misdeeds.

All at once I caught sight of an extraordinary figure crossing the court-yard. Is it a lunatic or a man in fancy dress ? He wears a bath-robe and his black, curly hair falls to his waist. The bar of his *grillos* is so heavy that he drags then along on a little wagon the wheels of which are made out of spools of thread. He stops for a moment, bows pleasantly to the group of men warming themselves in the sun and raises his head. Now I recognize him. He is Roman Delgado-Chalbaud.

Delgado-Chalbaud was arrested on May 17 1913. At that time he was President of the Companie de Navigation Fluviale et Cotière. One hundred and fifty-seven other men were arrested at the same time. Fifty-seven were thrown into the dungeons of the fortresses of Porto Cabello and San Carlos, fifty remained at La Rotonde ; others were freed one by one after having been confined for periods ranging from three to six years. At the time of which I am

now writing seven were still alive and at La Rotonde, Roman Delgado-Chalbaud, the famous preacher Father D. Antonio Luis-Mendoza, the lawyer Nestor Luis Perez, and Colonels M. Delgado-Chalbaud, Carlos Iru and Ramon Parraga. The last named officer was paralyzed but nevertheless chained with a pair of *grillos*. Those worn by the Delgado-Chalbaud brothers and the aged General Avelino Uzcategui, who had been locked up about the same time on account of the personal dislike of Gomez, weighed eighty-five pounds apiece. The former governor, Luis Duarte Cacique, had tortured these prisoners by shutting them up naked in cells of which the pavement was daily flooded to a depth of several inches. Double curtains were nailed over the doors so that neither light nor air could get in and for years they were kept on a starvation diet. The only way they managed to survive was thanks to the self-sacrifice of their companions who passed them some of their own scanty supply of food.

This was done in spite of the cruel watchfulness of the jailors, all convicted criminals who had been specially chosen from the lowest class of convicts. One of the most notorious of these wardens was a *culi*, a Hindu who had escaped from one of the islands of the Antilese near Trinidad and whose ferocious instincts had appeared after he had been betrayed by a woman. When asked why he was in prison he always gave the same answer ; « Woman deceive me. I kill woman. I kill son. I kill mother of woman. I kill dog. I kill cat. I not kill parrot because it fly away. »

This was the type of man who was put in charge of the prisoners imprisoned for political offenses.

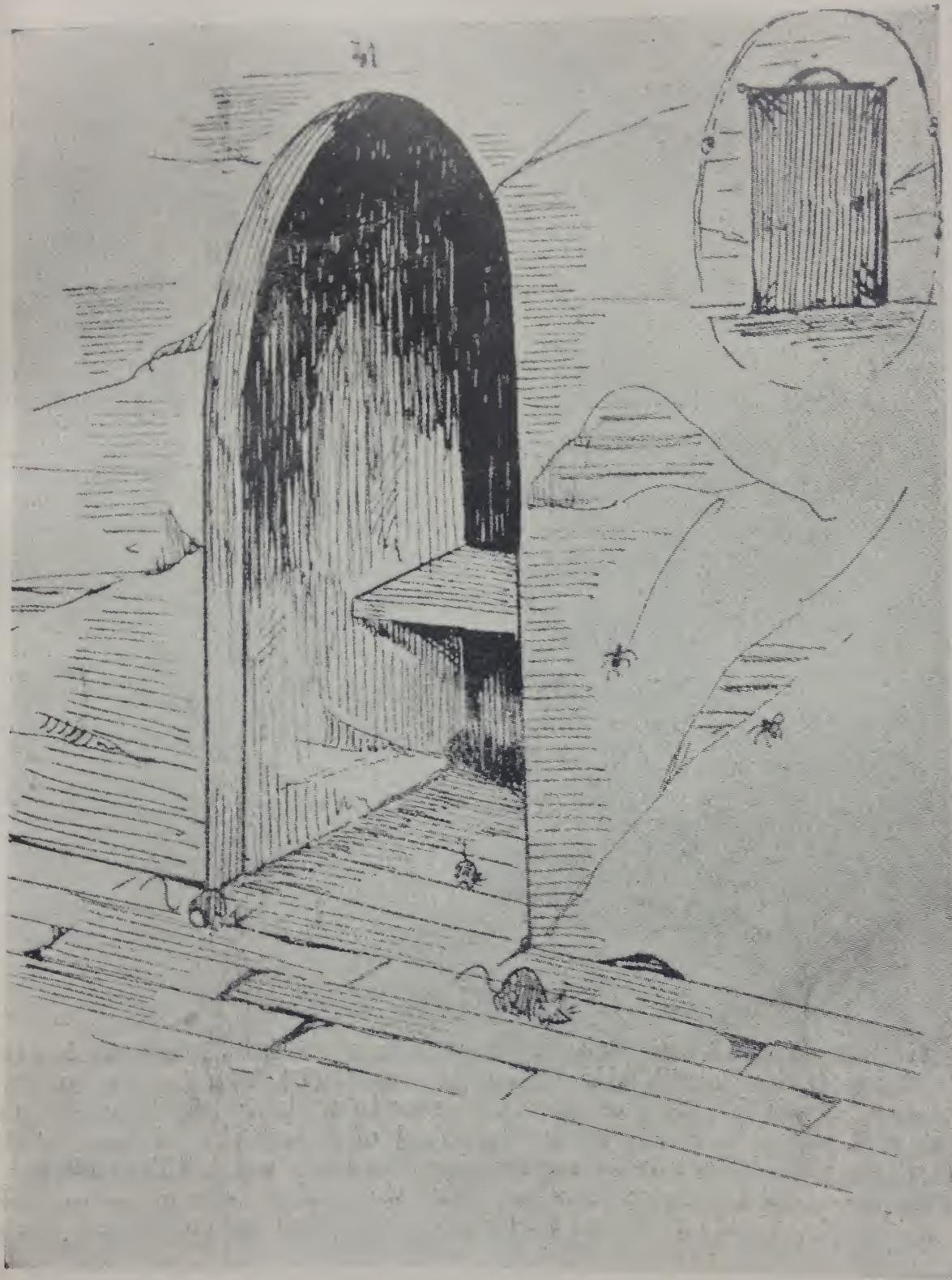
Regarding Antonio Leocadio Bermudez, alias Cachimbo, another of the wardens, I also heard

various tales. He, like the Turk at San Carlos when Jorge Bello was there or Nereo, seems to have been one, of those wretched beings whose natural instincts and vicious training specially qualify them to ill-treat their fellow-men. They are the scum of society. Many people are particularly severe in their judgements of such monsters, who are often held responsible for the sufferings which we were made to endure. Some of their victims after being released sought to revenge themselves on these « prison-curs » as we used to call them. Yet these same people are prepared to sing the praises of a Gomez on the floor of Congress or in the press. I recall a striking instance of this sort of thing. A young lawyer, who had been at one time himself in prison proceeded to especially prosecute Nereo, the warden convicted of murdering his mistress and whose sentence had not yet been decided. This lawyer became one of Gomez'favorites, after one of his relatives had married the despot's son, and revenged himself on Nereo by having him sent to the dungeons of the Chateau. Yet it is obviously wrong that such men as Nereo Pacheco, who after all was nothing but an obscur underling, should pay for the crimes instigated and encouraged by those whom later the prosecutors acclaim. Christ, on the cross, did not demand the punishment of those who had driven in the nails and cast lotes for His tunic. On the contrary He begged that they be forgiven for their ignorance, their blindness, the depth to which they had sunk. Men who, like the lawyer, attempt to « avenge » their fellows, even though they remove that particular brute would do more permanent good if they maintained a more dignified attitude and did not seem to confuse the abstract idea of justice with that of satisfying their

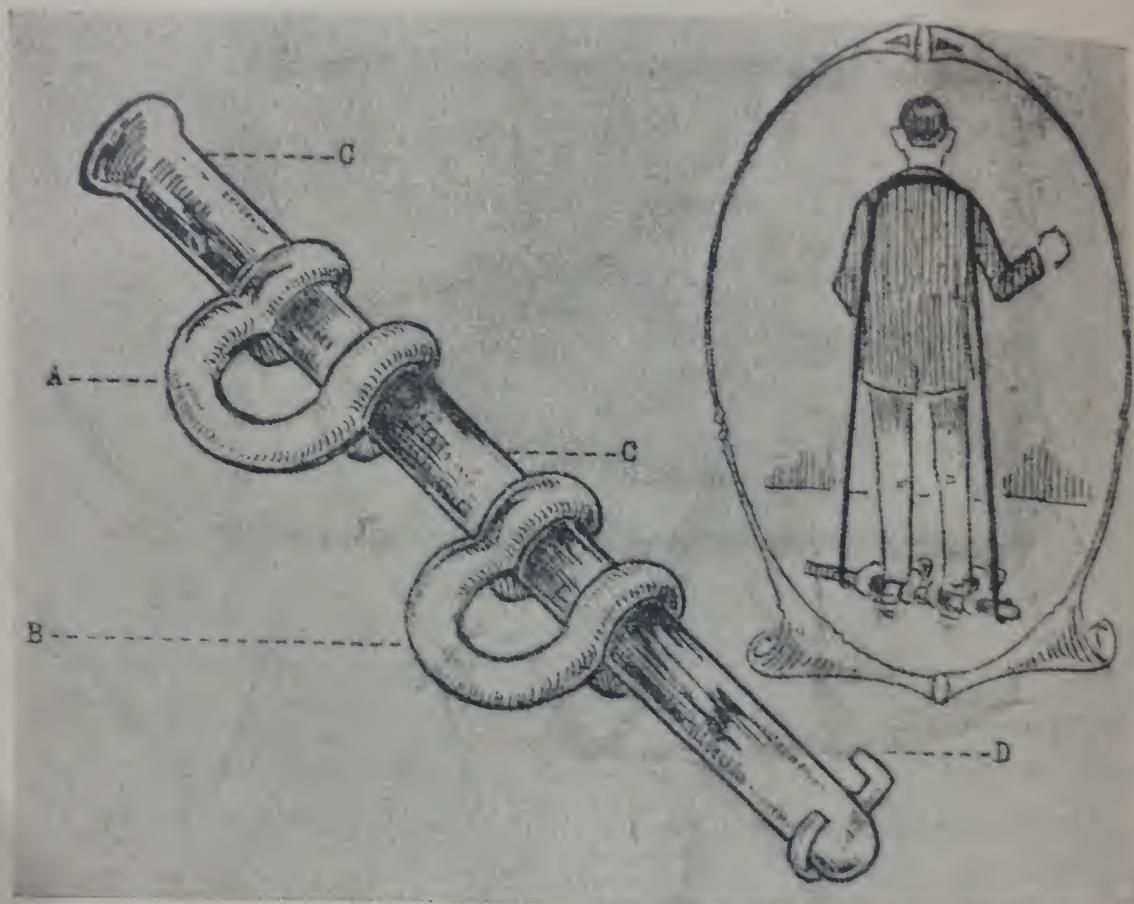
personal feuds. If one condemns to hard labor or severe punishment of any kind men such as the *culi*, the Cachimbos, or the Nereos, what is left for the Medinas, the « don Juanchos, the Marquez Bustillos and the Juan Vicentes ? I put on the same moral plane Nereo Pachecco and General Vicentico. The latter I pillory beside his father among that collection of reprobates whose only hope of absolution lies in the forgetfulness of posterity and the innate and incorrigible thoughtlessness of the Venezuelans in the days of the decadence of the Republic. If it was for me to pass sentence upon them it would perhaps be only Nereo for whom the gate of repentence would open wide its doors of mercy.

The alleged conspiracy of Delgado-Chalbaud arrived most opportunely for Gomez. The latter is a brilliant business man and he seized the pretext to extort some 200.000 bolivars from Delgado-Chalbaud during the year 1913. It was Duarte Cacique, who was governor at the time, who sent Roa, now the secretary of La Rotonde, to inform the prisoner that he would be deprived of food and water until he had signed an order for to pay out such and such an amount. On Chalbaud's refusing to do so the threat was carried out and he was left thirsty and starving in his cell. No one even came near him to empty his toilette. At last he signed. This took place on several occasions and explains why M<sup>me</sup> Delgado-Chalbaud paid over some 50.000 pesos to Cacique and his son. The father died suddenly. The son lay a long while ill with cancer of the shoulder at the Military Hospital. Their deaths put an end to a course of procedure which Dumas the Elder would never have conceived. The unhappy man is ignorant to this day that Gomez is at present the owner of his ranches, for

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A cell. In the voal, it is so wheis the curtain is fixed. During the first months one stuffs the upper part and the curtain is fixed in. The cell of which the aspect is that of a trapeze, measure 1 m. 70 on 2 m. 10 : the height is 2 m. 70.



### GRILLOS

The two rings (A et B) are placed on the prisoner's ankles. Next the bar (C) is slipped through them and held in place by a rivet (D). The feet are placed in the position shown in the medallion. In order to walk the prisoner slips a rope over the ends of the bar and places an object of some sort (a tin box or bit of wood) underneath the bar between the rings. The bar weighs 55 or 70 lbs and each ring about 27 lbs more. The prisoners wears these « grillos » throughout his confinement which lasts at least three, sometimes as much as sixteen years.

his wife was not allowed to consult him as to whether or not she should sell at a price fixed by the buyer, who threatened her father, till the latter agreed to turn over to him the three farms belonging to Delgado-Chalbaud. As a fitting climax to this episode we find Gomez seizing shares of stock in the Companie de Navigation Fluviale et Cotière valued at over half a million bolivars which were the private property of Delgado-Chalbaud selling them for 20 % of their value and becoming sole head of the entire enterprise.

Even supposing that a conspiracy against Gomez really had existed would it have justified such measures ? If this beast in human form must satisfy his cruelty what more does he need than the sight of strong men reduced to huddled skeletons, livid ghosts, starving, ruined, abject in their misery ? What need he fear of this man laden with chains and too exhausted to dream of vengeance or even to do more than drag out a few years of ill-health and depression ?

It seems inexplicable that Roman Delgado-Chalbaud should still be alive. And yet his movements are lithe, his glance dark and quick. The sight of him recalls to my mind a host of memories. His misfortunes, his bravery, his energy have won over even his enemies. He has been here now nine years. What crime can he be expiating ?

This is his sin. He dared to write on the first page on his service-sheet words which have remained ineffaceable ever since. He backed them up with his fortune, his social position, his career. His initiation into public life was brief but hectic. He was trained in the aggressive, belligerent school of Castro. In his youth he was hard and cruel himself. The atmosphere which surrounded him was an atmosphere of gam-

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bling, of quick promotion, of temptations rarely resisted. I can recall the night when, towards the end of 1907, from my cell in the fortress of Puerto Cabello where I was already confined for political offenses, I listened to the exuberant rejoicings that accompanied his marriage. In those days he was a squadron commander in the navy, the head of the navy-yard. Rockets shot skyward. Waves of music drifted upwards to our calls. Whistles blew. Cheers sounded in the distance. Love, wealth, happiness, all that this world has to offer lay in the hands of the pampered child of fortune. Three cells away from mine another political prisoner, Duarte Cacique, groaned in agony. He was suffering from a kidney complaint and no medical attendance was available. His only companion and comforter was the priest Adolfo Lopez. Five years passed. Duarte Cacique was governor of La Rotonde and Roman Delgado-Chalbaud was one of the prisoners under his care.

The cruelty of Duarte Cacique is something that cannot be described. Deformed in body and soul he was vicious, and spiteful, exacting full measure for what he had been obliged to endure in the past.

Perhaps the time has really come when, in the name of a pure and abstract justice, one may pass judgement on the case of Delgado-Chalbaud. The Gomez clan accuses him of being a hypocrite and a traitor, of having pretended to be the friend of Juan Vincente up to the morning when the plot was to be carried out. But one curious thing about this indictment is that it is drawn up by the very people who participated in the plot and all the other plots that accompany the existence of this abnormal creation, that calls itself a duly constituted government, but which is nothing more nor less than a glo-

rification of deceit and treason. This regime like those which preceded it resembles that of a prison or a convict camp. One may either be for Gomez or against Gomez, but in both cases one is within his walls, watched by his spies, threatened by their daggers. A highly organized force of personal police encircles, in a band of steel a whole nation consisting of two and a half million men living in a territory of seven hundred square miles. You are a prisoner whether you live in the palace of Miraflores or in a cell at La Rotonde, whether you banquet in the dining hall of the pleasure house at Maracay or gnaw a bone in the dungeons of the fortress of San Carlos. The only difference is that one prison is out in the open, the other behind high walls, but both are prisons. In the fertile valleys of Aragua you may have titles and make money, in the hell-holes one catches fleas and dysentery, on the national highways you get sun-stroke and lashes. At heart all Venezuelans are animated by a spirit of hatred or revenge, or hope that some day some one preferably Gomez himself shall pay for all this and pay dear. Such a thing as loyalty no longer exists. No one is ever so thoroughly betrayed as by their closest friend.

When one recalls that in the present instance the chief prisoner is the general's closest friend why should one feel indignant. After all the Gomez family are nothing but a band of highwaymen who, a gun in each hand, are obliging the nation to stand and deliver. Can it be called treason in such case for some man to slip up behind the robbers and strike down their pistol or to slam the door in their faces and call in the police. Yet they brand such a man a traitor and say, « Did he not try to take our weapons from us, to make us give up our booty ? »

Or, if the victim gets away then they are equally indignant. « Just think how ungrateful he is. He goes off and he actually has kept his shirt and trousers. »

Let it be known once and for all neither Delgado-Chalbaud, nor the young officers, nor the young civilians who helped Gomez, nor anyone in all Venezuela is disloyal. To be disloyal is to return evil for good, to bite the hand that fed you. Gomez is the incarnation of disloyalty, of treachery, his rule is treason converted into a plank in the governmental platform. One does not betray a traitor, one dupes him, one leads him into an ambush, one blindfolds him, — and then one shoots him like dog that he is.

Juan Vicente Gomez was a traitor when, in 1911, having sent Delgado-Chalbaud to Europe with full plenipotentiary powers to arrange with European capital to establish banks and other commercial enterprises in Venezuela, he after his agent returned having concluded agreements which would be advantageous to Venezuela, repudiated Delgado-Chalbaud's negotiations and made him and those who had trusted him a public laughing stock. This Gomez did for fear the introduction of foreign capital might hamper his lawless methods of handling the public finances and of interfering in commercial enterprises of all kinds.

Gomez was a traitor, when, in 1913, he invented a silly fairy tale as an excuse for wholesale arrests and when later, still under the same pretext, he suspended the constitutional guarantees, seized the sword of dictatorship and, at a single blow, disrupted the Constitution in order to exercise complete and uncontrolled authority.

In his nineteen years of public life Gomez has played the traitor nineteen times. He betrayed Gas-

tro to their common enemies at La Victoria and Ciudad Bolivar <sup>1</sup>, and then turned and took Castro's part against his former allies. Feeling that he had nevertheless lost the confidence of the man who had first given him a chance to succeed, he threw himself into the arms of Baldo, of Baptista and of Paul but when the panic of 1906 occurred he left the latter to fend for themselves.

Having managed to regain Castro's favor Gomez definitely betrayed the trust that the elder man placed in him. Incidentally he managed to sacrifice Paul. He associated himself with Alcantara and the members of the « Conspiracy » to whom he presented as spoils the members of Baptista's clan. When the young members of the Club Venezolano had become convinced of the good-faith of this fat, crafty, apparently guileless accomplice of theirs he, one fine day, had them rounded up by his police and given the choice of the Caribbean sea or the cells of La Rotonde. Constantly one finds him siding with those who supported him in 1908 to checkmate those who had helped pass the « temporary decree » and those who had taken part in the campaign of Coro and of whom he is now afraid. Today, who can he look on as a friend ? Even the members of his own family call him « the General » and avoid him, while the ridiculous figurehead who acts as his servant and bears the title of President *pro tem* is not a man but a saw-dust puppet.

The low hypocrisy of Gomez is apparent in everything he does. For instance one day at Macuto, the beautiful young wife of Delgado-Chalbaud a woman belonging to one of our best families, mad

<sup>1</sup> (1) Two cities of Venezuela where after hard fighting a revolution against Castro was suppressed.

with grief at having had no news of her husband for years and years, threw herself at Gomez's feet with her two little children and with tears streaming down her cheeks, seized his hand and said.

« Compadre I implore you for the sake of my little children to free Roman ? »

The kind hearted General helped her to rise and said paternally.

« Why certainly, *comadre*, I will hasten to do so. »

That same night he described at the dinner table what had occurred.

« What did you tell her ? » asked one of his sister.

« That I would free her husband as soon as I took office as president. »

« And as you have no intention of doing that for some time... » answered Gomez's sister, completing with a smile her brother's sentence.

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The court-yard becomes empty. As I watch I see an old man emerge from the shadows of the overhanging roof and walk towards the well. The rattle of heavy chains accompanies his movements. He seems a figure come down from the ceiling of the Sixtine chapel. His beard, as snarled and matted as that of a goat, falls almost to his waist. He is coming from the bath. A towel is knotted about his middle. His long white beard and hoary head are clarely visible in the rays of the burning sun. He bears on one shoulder the heavy cord that fixes an enormous pair of *grillos* to his muscular ankles. The bar between the *grillos* is as thick as a man's wrist. He stops in front of the curtain, from behind which some has called to him, smiles and bows cordially

and his blue eyes, as they turn in my direction, have the candid expression one finds in those of a child. It is General Avelino. He was arrested at the time of affair Delgado-Chalbaud and is now over eighty years old. He served for many years with distinction in the Venezuelan army. Gomez is revenging himself on him because Uzcategui refused to help him plot the overthrow of Cipriano Castro. At that time Uzcategui was military commander of the Federal District and he remained loyal to his chief. This is an unforgivable sin in the eyes of Gomez.

Uzcategui bears his captivity courageously. As he stand there in the middle of the court-yard his white hair, still wet, gleaming in the light he is a wonderful example of resolution, of strength, of unconquerable revolt. Garcita passes by and hands him affectionately a little pot of coffee which the old man drinks smilingly. Four generations separate the boy from the man, four generations which have steadily gone down-hill.

I must retire from my « periscope », the sight of the court-yard, the melancholy aspect of the corner of the prison, the dwarfed trees trying to grow between the cracks of the ciment, the motionless prisoners, all this makes me feel depressed and ill.

There is only one note of coolness, of beauty in the picture. The water in the fountain. Here the pigeons come and drink occasionally. Frightened by something they rise and escape towards the rooftops. The sound of their wings strikes our ears like a slap in the face.



A man confined in La Rotonde or, in the court-

yard, as one calls the space that divides the two prisons walks over and strikes the hour with a piece of iron. No lover, neither Tristan nor Hero waiting in the darkness for Leandre, ever measured with a more restless fever the passage of the minutes and hours than do the prisoners marking meticulously the all too laggard march of time. I have managed to find an escape from that obsession by plunging my mind into a sea of thoughts that have as little as possible to do with what goes on about me. I force myself to forget where I am, but all too frequently I am recalled to reality. When I lie stretched out on my plank with my eyes fixed on the ceiling or the leprous walls spotted with sinister stains I cannot help seeing the faint scratches, made with a finger nail, by which the former occupants of the cells left records of their passage there. The handwriting is frequently awkward and ill formed. Only the fortunate few have managed to scribble with a bit of brick, or a worn-out pencil stub. Near my feet, on the wall is an inscription « Clara Campo. » He was a native from Guyana who died here. Further along is the menu of a meal « two bits of bread, one cheese, three *papelones*. » It is signed « Aureliano Robles. » That general also died in cell 41, where Lieutenant Colonel Carlos Garcia Carvallo likewise breathed his last. Above there are a few words scratched on the stone with a pointed instrument of some sort. « Leopoldo Ortega Lima ». Did he too perish there ? No one can tell. I knew him well ; He was a young and gifted man, the son of General Leopoldo Ortega. His mother, a very intelligent and energetic woman, lost her husband while still very young. She was the daughter of General Evaristo Lima<sup>1</sup> and niece of

(1) Remarkable military leader of great wealth.

the great cavalry officer Luis Loreto<sup>1</sup>. Her eldest son, the hope of thir declining years, perished in prison, dying of want and starvation. He, or some one else, copied some bitter, poignant epigrams, some verses by Jose de Diego, still faintly visible on the wall. Further on one finds the title of a book which probably Lima intended to write « *La Rotonde* seen from inside. »

Each of these inscriptions, each of the bloody stains tells a story. A story of suffering, of pain, of hunger, of martyrdom. All these cells are full of the germs of consumption. One sees on the faces of the prisoners the symptoms of that dread disease.

Poor Colonel Americo Spinetti whose muffled voice and hacking cough I sometimes hear. I have seen him walking about. Deathly pale, hollow cheeked, with thin shoulders and his poor bones almost piercing his worn blouse. One of the orderlies named Ramon Isidro Rendon has had to be relieved from duty. He spent hours lying on the ground waiting for death to come and put him out of his misery. Next to him Victor Caricote, who looked like a wrinkled mummy, cursed and swore when he felt his end drawing near. An intestinal form of tuberculoses is what generally carries them off finally.

In the afternoon, after the *rancho*, a wretched sort of stew in which rotten grains of corn float about in briny water which the orderlies pass under the curtains while Nereo watches them with a severe glances, I return to my observation post. I make a few remarks to Nereo. When he goes away a low voice calls to me from the neighboring cell.

« Who are you ? » I ask.

(1) Brave fighter and famous horseman who was known as « the last of the Centaurs ».

« A man you know, Lucas Manzano... « Gonfalon ».

I am surprised that he should be here. He was so friendly with Masquez Bustillos and indeed with all the members of the administration. He explains to me that the disgrace of one of the favorites caused him to get into trouble and that he has been here for days and days. Manzano recognized my voice when I spoke to Nereo. He worries over what may have happened to his wife and little daughters, but nevertheless jokes about our wretched food and the torments we are obliged to endure. From Manzano I find out who our neighbors are. On the right we have Torres Abandero, Dr Juan Jose Abreu, Dr Julian, Jorge Luciani. Further along, in cell n° 48, the one next to the stairs and with double blankets nailed over the door, is Dr Aquiles Iturbe. Quietly, secretly we establish contacts from one cell to another. There are many surprises. Some of the prisoners say they cannot eat, others are ill, a few refuse to « carry on conversations » for fear of « compromising themselves. »

Almost immediately thanks to my neighbors and the orderlies I manage to identify all the prisoners who cross the court or who sit at the doors of their cells.

Here for instance is Dr Francisco de Paula Reyes, with his short pointed beard and streaming white hair, looking wistfully at the sky. His misfortunes are not limited to his captivity. It is the third or fourth time he has been thrown into jail. Each time that he is released it is in order that he may attend the funeral of one of his sons. Another dark, thin man with heavy grey mustaches and a aloof manner is Reyes Moncayo. Sitting on a little bench Miguel Delgado-Chalbaud is talking to Nestor Luis Perez. The latter seems made of wax his ears are trans-

that parent and his shrunken body looks lost in a blouse is too big for him. Can it be the same restless, energetic, lively man with whom I plotted in 1912.

I see Ramon Parraga go by. He makes a great deal of noise when he walks about because his irons are light. He has one leg paralysed and the idea of putting irons on the other is stupid and cruel. His great black eyes have the fixity of incipient madness.

Each separate group seems to have its special time for going out in the court-yard. Today it seems that they have agreed to arrange it so that we will see them all and that we may exchange a silent greeting. I recognize Fermin Huizi, Rafael-Ricardo Revenga, Colonel Ponte Urbaneja and Don as Pancho Rivero Saldivia as ironic and pleasant ever who answers the disagreeable remarks of Nereo so wittily that we cannot help laughing.

Norbeto Borges, who is also in irons, drags his lame leg along with a great clatter. He is deaf, thin and has aged greatly. To have shackled Parraga, the paraletic and Borges, the cripple, gives an idea of the friendish cruelty of Governor Medin, who has a wooden leg himself and should sympathize with those who suffer from the same affliction.

I have already spoken of Dr Francisco-Dominguez Acosta, who in 1906 was Secretary General of Carabobo and was interested in theosophy. Acosta's only crime was that he published an article in his magazine *Dharma*, which was reprinted in *El Fonografo* and resulted in the suppression of both publications. In this famous article all that Acosta said was that the time had come to attack tyranny all over the world, to purify society and to refuse to continue the ridiculous attitude of neutrality that the government had adopted. He was condemned to prison and to be placed in irons. This amounted

to a death sentence for him. From my observatory I watch him as he sits on a box near the little trees that grow in the court-yard. His eyes are shadowy and turn to the water falling from the fountain. At times he smiles when Dr Reyes, trembling with rage, curses Nereo with especial violence, or when the pigeons come down for a drink. Both smiles are equally tender. Close by nice looking Carlos Iru's is washing his linen. He too is a victim of « Don Juan-chito », for in Venezuela each of the tyrants has his own prisoners. There are those who have been « put away » by order of Dr Vivas, among them Huizi, and Ildemaro Urdaneta. Octavio Pocaterra of Maracaibo was also arrested by order of Vivas at the request of his negro dentist. As the prisoner lacked political protectors he was left to his fate and died of consumption in the criminals section of La Rotonde.

There are prisoners who have no idea of who sent them there and others who do not know what crime they are accused of. Others are confined for perfectly ridiculous charges. For instance there is young Pedro Ezequiel Garcia who landed at La Guira on his way back from New York. It having been rumored that Garcia was bringing back some letters with him, he was searched. Although no letters were not found on his person or in his baggage, he was sent to La Rotonde, placed in irons and cut off from all communication with the outside world.

David Gimon Perez, President of the state of Bolivar sent here one hundred men who had joined the opposition forces at the time when General Jose Manuel Hernandez was camping near the mouths of the Orinoco during the « conspiracy » of Ducharme. Fifty were supposed to be put to work on the roads. I have already told how eighteen died of maltreatment at Guanta. Of the fifty who were

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sent to La Rotonde seven are still alive. These survivors are Reyes Moncado who was brought here before his wounds were healed, Mogollon, Narciso Garcia, Ernesto Carias, Americo Spinetti, Caricote and Ramon Isidro Rendon.

It happened quite often that from my periscope I watched the movements of a little old man with a malicious face. His name is General Felix Mosquero. He reminded me of the Quillon Quilonides of Sienkiewicz. Mosquera seemed to have reached the last stages of decrepitude and was on excellent terms with Nereo. Sometimes he lost his temper and flew into a rage abusing even his companions, particular Carcote and some of the other prisoners on the same tier. He had probably gone a little mad from grief and starvation.

When one of the prisoners suddenly loses his mind and begins to insult the others Nereo is much amused and eggs him on. The person he particularly likes to see attacked is Father Mendoza. If anyone dares to intervene and take the priest's side the warden becomes angry and threatens to beat both Father Mendoza and his friend.

Yesterday Father Mendoza was in the middle of the court-yard motionless, silent and sad in his long white cloak which falls to his feet and even hides his irons. The latter are enormous. The rope that holds them in place is a heavy one which marks the old man's back like a sort of stole. Occasionally his rich, powerful voice with its rich inflexions is heard urging patience and demanding justice.

Besides him is Father Monteverde, a man of seventy, as thin as a skeleton, with his neck bent by the weight of his chains. Father Monteverde seldom speaks. The two priests have been living this life for seven or eight years. Mendoza was arrested be-

cuse in one of his sermons, delivered at the church of the Valle of which he was rector, he dared protest against the existing state of sexual immorality which he saw all about him. Gomez felt that the remarks applied to him.

Monteverde had been implicated in one of those absurd plots such as the police invent to justify their existence and for which they manufacture the evidence and pick out the guilty persons in advance.

Meanwhile Archbishop Rincon Gonzalez is undisturbed at Maracay. The Papal Nuncios come and go, bestow their blessings on the Administration, collect the offering of the faithful and little by little prepare the way for the gradual invasion of Venezuela by foreign clergy.

Gomez as head of the state has behaved more disrespectfully towards the Church than any of his predecessors. The exile of Archbishop Guevara by Guzman Blanco<sup>1</sup> about which so much fuss was made is insignificant compared to the crimes of Juan Vicente, against which the Vatican has never uttered a word of protest. Gomez exiled Father Oraa, he poisoned Father Ramirez and Father Franquiz and these venerable priests, Mendoza and Monteverde, have been kept in irons in spite of their failing health for the last eight years at La Rotonde. What has become of the spirit of the Church Militant, of the dignity of the Episcopal Power, of the shepherd's crook supposed to protect his flock ? To satisfy a hord of scheming priests Gomez scatters a handfull of bishoprics and canonships and the Venezuelan clergy, headed by their Archbishop, grovel on all-fours to fight over them. After which they proceed

(1) Famous President of Venezuela who did much for the cause of civilization.

to draw up pastoral letters and articles for the religious press in praise of public morals and the State.

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At nine o'clock we heard outside the grating the call that means that something is about to happen.

« Hie there, 'Nereo ! »

« Everybody into their cell. Drop the curtains. »

I decide to remain lying on my plank waiting to see what will happen.

People come and go. They pass through the grating and out again. I hear them questioning and threatening the prisoners. Only last night in cell n° 40, right beside me they put the poor man confined there through a kind of « third degree ». Now I hear the oily and unkind voice of Roa, the Governor's secretary saying.

« But why don't you tell us what we want to know ? Just see what an awkward position that puts us in. And it will only make things harder for you. »

Medina himself is helping Roa interrogate the victim. The governor is sitting on a chair which Nereo has brought him while the latter remains a few steps outside the door, watching that the other prisoners do not try and come too close to their curtains in order to hear what is being said.

The voice of the man they are brow-beating answers feebly.

« But what do you want me to say ? There is nothing I can tell you. »

The next morning I say to my neighbor.

« I am so-and-so. Who are you ? »

« Manuel Maria Aponte. »

« The Major. »

« Yes. »

« Let us look at one another. »

Quickly we both lift up a corner of the curtain. It is the work of an instant. The face that I see before me is deathly pale but calm with dark eyes and a short, little mustache. He is probably twenty-six or twenty-eight. The smile we exchange is an eloquent one.

Dropping the curtains back into place we resume our conversation. My new neighbor tells me that as the result of the tortures he has endured the skin of his genital organs has been torn off and the pain is spreading through his lower abdomen and kidneys.

I in turn relate what probably happened to the prisoner who occupied the cell he is now in and who was taken away yesterday at noon. I had caught a glimpse of this prisoner earlier in the day. He was a mere boy only fifteen or sixteen years old, so he told me, adding he did not know his exact age because he had been in prison « such a long while. » He had asked me if I knew what was happening in the city. I had told him as much as I could.

« Did you happen to hear anything about Captain Felix Andrade Mora ? » the boy asked eagerly.

« Yes », I replied, « I heard that he had died at the Trinidad barracks while he was being tortured by order of Aparcio Gomez. »

There was a pause. My neighbor had stopped talking. Suddenly I heard a sob.

« What is the matter ? » I inquired.

A voice broken with grief answered, « He was my brother. My name is Manuel Andrade Mora. »

« Look out here comes « the cur ». Warned « Gon-falon » from the other side.

Both of us retired to the back of our cells. The « cur » came in, cursing, and shouted that if he caught

any prisoner « blabbing » with another one he'd have them both beaten. Men had died after such beatings.

Nor was the threat an empty one. During the first days of my captivity some one to my left who was ill and delirious believed that he was being spied on and kept on crying.

« I see you, Nereo. I know you are coming to hang me. Come in, come in, if you dare. I'll strangle you with my bare hands, you ruffian, you vile wretch. »

Delirium is a horrible thing. We imagined that what the mad man was saying was true and that Nereo's denials were pure hypocrisy.

« Keep quiet, hold your tongue. »

« Yes, I see you coming, I know you are in that corner. »

The attack grew worse and the tragic dialogue went on all night. Our overstrained imagination and the shrieks of the sick man made us suppose things were happening that did not really take place. The next morning there was more shrieking and the sound of chains rattling violently. It seems that the man who had been delirious had left his cell and tried to throw himself over the railing into the court below.

« Stop him, stop him. Don't let him go over. Don't let him kill himself » cried the prisoners on the lower tiers.

The « Cur » and the orderlies came running up. They seized the unfortunate man and tied him to the plank in his cell, beating him violently as they did so. It was intolerable. Cries of indignation came from sole of the neighboring cells.

« You coward ! You rascal ! You brute ! »

« Don't hurt him any more ! »

« That's enough Nereo ! » ordered Father Mendoza in a commanding tone.

Later I heard that the name of the victim was Jorge Luciani.

The wisest thing to do when such incidents occurred was to remain a spectator and not take any part in the affair. Moreover when one is practically naked, with irons weighing seventy-five pounds attached to one's feet, weak from lack of sleep and half starved how can a man find courage enough to do otherwise. All one is capable of is to try and peer through a crack in the curtain, lying on the cold floor with one's ear to the curtain.

To-night however all sorts of things are happening. Prisoners with irons on their arms are going through the corridor. Some of our companions are crying out that they are being taken away in this fashion. The guards put irons on the captives' arms in order they may be transferred from one place to another more rapidly as it is slow moving them when they have on iron anklets. It is also sometimes done to alarm a prisoner.

Imagine what it must be like to be lying still, perhaps even asleep, and suddenly feel oneself seized in the darkness by unknown hands. Nereo, with his cruel humor, remarks on such occasions.

« Now's the time to say your last prayer. »

I hear Torres Abandero, whose voice I know by this time crying, « What's the matter ? Why am I being disturbed ? Where are you taking me ? »

Nereo who is a surly mood answers ?

« Shut up and pray. »

The light of lanterns in the court-yard make my curtain a kind of cinema screen across which fantastic shadows pass and repass.

All at once foot-steps stop outside my cell. The

curtain is pulled aside and a man comes in carrying another one on his back. He drops his burden beside my plank against the wall, then turns and goes out without saying a word. The newcomer lies where he has fallen, motionless.

My eyes, grown used to the darkness, make out a bald head, a dark face, eyes that stare at me with an expression of indescribable terror. Suddenly I recognize him and throw my arms around him.

« Doctor Juliac. »

The poor man trembles with joy and surprise. Overcome with emotion he can only stammer out.

« Pocaterra! God be praised! I thought you were dead. »

Again we embrace. Try and imagine the feeling of two shipwrecked sailors finding one another on the same bit of wreckage in mid-ocean, or two neighbors meeting amid the confusion and turmoil that follows an earthquake.

Juliac has brought many things with him. He has some pots and pans, a *pimpina*, an aluminum cup, a spoon, and two plates. Besides these supplies he is also the proud possessor of a pair of sandals, a *ponchera*, some linen. But his most valuable possession of all is his cheerfulness. He talks to me touchingly about my father. They both took part in the first reactionary movements against Guzmán Blanco. When he settled down on the hard stones I said to him.

« We will take turns on the plank. »

To which he replied like the famous Cuautemoc one of our legendary heroes.

« Am I not lying on a bed of roses? »

From then we always spoke of the ground by that name. He told me why he was in prison. It was because he and Dr Abreu had brought suit against

a client who would not pay what he owed them. Every time they met their debtor in the street they used to remark by way of a joke.

« Have you any news of « the man ? »

A spy overheard them. Probably he thought they were referring to Gomez and that is how they came to enter the gates of La Rotonde.

When Juliac looked at his grillos which were like mine he would shake his head, and murmur.

« How shockingly vulgar those things are. » And we would both burst out laughing.

Now that there were two of us life grew easier to bear. We told each other our troubles. Juliac is the most entertaining man in Venezuela, he knows everybody, has remembered everything. He is extremely refined, highly intelligent and his irony has none of that bitter tang one finds so often in the phrases of men of lower origin. Occasionally he grows melancholy, when he recalls his home, his wife, his daughters...

« But my dear Juliac what reasons did they give for arresting you ? »

« None at all. Perhaps they told you that the matter was very serious. To me they said nothing about it being serious or the reverse. Basilio Gabante took me to the police station. On the way he told me that the matter was one which concerned me. From there I was placed in a carriage and brought to La Rotonde. I was put in solitary confinement and had chains attached to my feet. Last night I was asleep when Nereo came to take me out of my cell and put me in here. »

« How about the other prisoners ? »

« I know nothing for certain. Judging by the noise, the way people come and go, they are still

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bringing new captives in. Half of Caracas must be here by this time. I've been here before now. »

« What ? You have already been shut up here ?

« Yes indeed. Several times in fact. But in those days there were no *grillos*. The curtain were only there to allow the prisoners to have some privacy. We were given everything we needed and allowed to see our friends and relatives at the grating. We had books to read. Cocho was governor then. It was in the days of Andrade <sup>2</sup> The last time I came Obdulio Bello <sup>2</sup> was our leader and Castro was in power. Even at that time there were no *grillos*.

« A prisoner who had been at La Rotonde before, and who I knew at the citadel of Puerto Cabello, towards the end of 1907, told me that me that Guitierrez Mendez, who was governor then, was severe and very cruel, towards some of the prisoners but that in general he did not allow them to be ill treated or to be exploited. »

• That may be true. »

« At any rate, he was not like this infamous cripple, the sneaking low debased criminal, this highway-robber of a Medina. What hyena bore him and what have we done that he should treat us the way he does. »

Juliac did not answer but bowed his bald head in silence. In the square outside we heard the tramping of the sentries. The guard was being changed. A clock struck in the distance. And we stopped whispering.

\* \* \*

It was almost nine o'clock one night and the pri-

(1) President of Venezuela from 1897-1899 overthrown by Castro.

(2) Governor of the Rotonde famous for his kindness.

soners on the lower tier were getting ready to go to bed when a voice was heard at the grating, a voice the sound of which made our hearts beat faster.

« Nereo ! »

The latter hurried to the gate, another leap brought him into the court-yard again.

« Everybody into his cell, Drop the curtains. »

A prisoner is being brought in. But something more than that is happening. The prisoners generally leap through the grating and this time we hear the grating being opened wide. That means that it is the governor who is coming in. His crippled leg will not let him jump through. Our sharp ears recognize every sound. From the foot-steps we can judge how many are in the party and who is there. The slapping of leggings in front—that is the Cur, steps in shoes—that must be the prisoner, then a tic-tac, tic-tac. that is the Governor's wooden leg. A voice whispers, « Father Lobero. »

They have hardly left the enclosure before we begin exchanging impressions. Why does the Governor act like this ? What is taking place in Caracas ? Are indignation meetings still being held ? It is astounding that Father Lobera, who is so popular with the high ecclesiastical authorities and the church going women should be here.

Juliac, leaning against the plank in the back of the cell, uttered words of wisdom.

« Something serious is happening, Father Lobera in prison. Do you know what that means ? »

I hesitated to draw any conclusions. Neither the low voice of the priest, as plaintif as that of a babe lost in the wood, nor the humble manner in which he spoke to the Governor, gave me a very high opinion of the newcomer. Nor did my esteem for him increase when « Gonfalon » tried to talk to him and

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received no reply or when Torres Abandero, enthusiastically, warned him of some of the dangers of our lot.

« Father Lobera, Father Lobera it is your friend Torres Abandero, right here beside you, who is talking to you. We are all friends and comrades in here. Nereo, the Cur, has gone out. We greet you. We embrace you. Do not be frightened. We will all help you and we won't let you be harmed. »

« I will let you know when « the Cur » comes back », adds « Gonfalon ».

From the back of his cell there comes a scared, timid voice, « I don't want to speak to anybody except « the Cur. »

This annoys Torres Abandero who answers ironically.

« Oh I see you are going in for that mystic stuff. You want to go into a retreat. Well you can retreat just as far as you like. »

Here and there one hears sounds of laughter. But Juliac continues to believe that the confinement of Father Lobera is a forerunner of great things.

« You'll see, you'll see. »

And this is what I really saw. The following morning at ten o'clock Father Lobera was escorted from his cell with the same ceremonial that had accompanied his arrival. A few moments later Captain Luis Rafael Pimentel was taken out of his dungeon n° 37 on my right. The *grillos* which chained him to his fellow prisoner Major Aponte were removed and the Captain was led down stairs and pushed through the grating. Pimentel was a man of thirty, tall, blond and distinguished looking a perfect aristocrat in appearance. Now his reddish beard had grown and becoming matted, his legs kept apart by the chains, had become so weak he could hardly stand

and it was only with the help of the orderlies that he was able to walk at all. He had been hung up eleven times by his testicles. From his cell Pimentel was taken to see the Governor. I cannot tell why but I could not help thinking there was some connection between the release of the priest and the officer's interview with Medina. We were all worried what was happening to him. An hour later he was brought back and rechained to Aponte. Father Lobera was never seen again. He undoubtedly had been released permanently. In those few hours he had probably acted the part of a stool-pigeon.

Before his departure however Father Mendoza has done his best to comfort the frightened ecclesiastic and old Father Monteverde crossed the court several times, dragging his enormous grillos behind him in order to reassure Lobera. But that chaplain of the Sainte-Chapelle, the powerful church-man who even here received special favors, cowered like a whipped puppy in the corner of his cage.

Apparently Lobera had not been instructed regarding the rules of the establishment for he ventured out on the balcony.

« Nereo ! Nereo ! » Why should be call the warden ? The latter responded with alacrity and bounded up the stairs.

« What are you doing out there ? Quick get back where you belong. Who told you you could come out ?

Shortly afterwards Father Lobera was taken away.

One morning, after a sleepless night during which we had to defend ourselves from bugs of all sorts, and even a scorpion, which our neighbors declared they had seen in one of the curtains, the orderly who brought me my watery coffee whispered • Ramon Isidro Rendon died this morning. •

Rendon was one of the orderlies. I watched the cell where the body was probably lying. Nereo went over to it with two needles and some heavy thread. The corpse was sewed up in the curtain that formed the door of the cell. They carried it out at ten o'clock. One knows the procedure. An ambulance is sent for from the Vargas hospital. The stretcher is taken to the entrance, through which food and living prisoners enter, there the body of this unhappy victim of misery and ill treatment is left for a while. Later it is taken away and, with the connivance of a doctor who is used to this sort of thing, a death certificate is prepared showing that death took place in one of the hospital wards.

When the body of Eloy Escobar Llamozas<sup>1</sup>, sewn in a sack, was handed over to his parents at the Vargas Hospital there was a scar on the neck that might have been that of a wound made with a weapon. Everyone understood that it probably came from the rope which held his grillos in place. Eloy Escobar Llamozas the son of the poet to whom Marti has dedicated an unforgettable page was a man of great social prestige. He had been obliged to leave the country in order to escape incessant persecutions and had already repeatedly served prison sentences in the days of Castro. On this particular occasion he had been basely betrayed. Feeling age coming on, and being ill and without funds in New York he had asked to have his safety assured by Gomez. Negotiations were carried on through Don Juanchito and at the suggestion, I believe, of Urbaneja, Llamozas, brother-in-law. Full and complete guarantees as to his safety were promised the exile. He landed

(1) A well educated, charitable man belonging to one of the best families in Caracas.

at La Guaira and from there was taken to La Rotonde where he died shortly afterwards.

Ramon Isidro Rendon was the second dead man I saw carried through the iron wicket. I noticed at the time that Nereo, naturally superstitious, took care to walk in front of the corpse and was the first person to go through the grating on the return trip.

When he came back Nereo took his harp, seated himself on the one and only chair there was and settled down comfortably in the outer corridor. There his nimble hands wrung from the instrument a *joropo* that was like a curse set to music.

The orderlies on coming out of the dead man's cell divided his pitiful belongings such as torn trousers, a earthen bowl, a scapulary. Afterwards they scattered *creoline* and forgetfullness on the spot

## CHAPTER XXIII

The Garden of a hundred Horrors. — Arsenic or poison as a fine art. — The martyrdom of Eliseo Lopez. — His death. — Twenty-seven more victims. — Iturbe's prison. — In neighboring cells. — Manna from the ground. — The pastimes of Nereo. — Hernandez, the police spy. — When hunger gnaws at one's vitals.

March-April.

One reads of blood-thirsty episodes in the pages that chronicle the lives of great adventurers. Crime and brutality have marked the evolution of many races. One recalls the wholesale poisonings that took place in Italy during the Renaissance, the gloomy schemings of Northern princes, the fierce hatreds that resulted in mysterious crimes committed in the shadow of the Greek gyneciums or in the baths of Asiatic potentates, the cold calculating revenge of ambitious ecclesiastics. Everywhere without exception one finds blood and tears, tears and blood. Calvin burned his opponents at the stake, the Borgias poisoned their rivals, Escobedo died of a knife thrust in the dark, and Don Juan of Austria was

carried off by a mysterious attack of dysentery. The type of torture chosen reveals the character of the executioner. Measured by such standards no criminal can ever have had as base and vile a soul as Gomez, for it is he who has carried torture to the uttermost lengths.

In prison I learned about some of his past sins. In spite of our being constantly under observation I managed to establish the necessary contacts. Nero sold us writing paper and my companions added secretly to my supply and contributed such bits of pencil as they managed to pick up. I thus am able to make a whole series of notes which I conceal in the cracks of the pavement or hang round by neck like a scapulary. Every day I learn a part of my notes by heart as though it were a lesson and afterwards I destroy them.

Sotero Mujica, who died here, others whose names I was not able to find out and Jose Santiago Gonzales, who is probably still alive for he was afterwards released, were tortured in the following manner. A rope was passed around their neck. One end of this rope was attached by a knot around the testicles. On the stomach about half way down this rope there was a bit of wood which served as a peg and which allowed the knot to be twisted till the testicles touched the groin. While this went on those who executed these hellish manœuvres, which took place in cells Nos. 18 to 13, would say to their victims.«

« Tell us what you know. We've had orders from the General to make you talk. »

The friends who performed these acts of cruelty were the particular favorites of Gomez, Ernesto elasco Ibarra, Cosme D. Montilla and Eloy Tarazona.

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Hunger, thirst, suffocation, the *grillos*, we were spared none of these horrors. In the middle of the night the prisoners would be driven from their cells into the middle of the court-yard. There they were beaten and, after having had thrown cold water over them, — the poor creatures would be allowed to crawl back to their cells. During certain years there would be three or four deaths a day, deaths due to dropsy, arterio-sclerosis, dysentery consumption and all the disorders of the digestif and nervous system and brought on by the dampness, the lack of proper food, the ill-treatment, the nervous strain of nights spent awaiting tortures which one cannot even recall without feeling nauseated. Flies were thick. The dreadful silence that prevailed in this well of stone was only broken by equally dreadful noises, by shrieks and howls of revolt, by oaths and blasphemies. After each outburst silence would come back and the only sound would be the rattle of the ambulance going back and forth between the prison and the hospital, those twin open sores on the face of the city.

The death agony of Dr Regulo Franquiz lasted two days. His intestins were torn and wrung by the effect of the arsenic-acid he had gradually absorbed in his food. As he waited for his last hour to come he alternately moaned and cried aloud in the delirium of an incipient attack of meningitis, reciting with the Holy psalms and the prayers of the Virgin of Carmel.

Franquiz' companion Father Ramirez died under equally sad conditions. He had to be carried out into the court-yard on a chair, even Nero was obliged to let him have some sun on account of the foul odor of his body covered with ulcers. He had gone mad following two hundred strokes of an ox-hide whip

had been given him after his arrest and he remained in that state till his death.

The two priests died only a few days apart and shortly afterwards M. Jose-Maria Franco, the brother-in-law of Father Ramirez, passed away in the same cell where Carlos Garcia Carvallo had previously expired.

Another of the men who was poisoned was the poet Eliseo Lopez. He was a young man of high moral character, fine and good. One day in December 1910 he had been accused of having planned to murder Gomez while the latter was attending the funeral of one of his relatives at the Southern cemetery. Andres Eloy de la Rosa, Diego Bautista Ferrer Junior and Gregorio Jose Riera testified as witnesses during this trial. I note this in order that these gentlemen may have a chance to come forward and say what happened during the examination of Eliseo Lopez, who was the man who accused him and what attitude they and Delgado Briceno, the secretary who presided at the trial, adopted at the time. Until the definite facts are known a sinister mystery envelopes the whole proceeding. Lopez entered La Rotonde in February 1916. He died there five months later. At first he was placed in a cell with Pedro Ezequiel Garcia situated in the outer court-yard of the deux rotondas, one of the cells called « those where we are forgotten ». There he and his fellow prisoners were given starvation diet. Later he was transferred to cell n° 23. It was there that on July 5 Nereo Pacheco brought him a mysterious cup of coffee. Probably it had been brewed in the same way as that given Father Franquiz. Like the latter Lopez after drinking it was seized with violent nausea and suddenly fell dead. He lay there, limp and disjointed like a puppet whose strings have

been cut, broken in two by the dreadful spasm that is provoked by an overdose of arsenic.

The widow of Eliseo Lopez was pregnant at the time of his death. Several years later she was obliged to go about begging in the streets of Caracas, holding her little girl by the hand.

Other men who died here were Ramon Figueroa, Felipe Gil, Francisco Bruce, Pablo Baez, Tomas Perez Alcantara, Sotero Mujica, Regino Barreto, Ramon Pena, Genaro Soto B., Abdon Gafaro, J.-M. Molina Tremaria, Francico Bellorin R., Publio Cesar Campos, Pedro Roso Nastardo, Celestino Estanga, Claro Juan Campos, Manuel Silva Gomez, Franscico de Paula Ochoa, Lucio Saavedra—in cell II, he died mad, Lorenzo Oze, Ramon Calderon, Rufo Nieves, Aureliano Robles, Jesus Florez, Andres Vloes, Emilio Merchan Nand, Ramon Portillo.

Regarding these different people I have only been able to gather fragmentary information. An effort doubtless will shortly be made to wipe all these crimes off the slate of history. But I defy any one to contradict a single one of my statements or remove a single name from the above list. There were indeed many more victims, but we will wait before we can draw up a final indictment to have a complete list of those who were so foully assassinated.

In cell n° 18 Iturbe has two curtains nailed over the door. He has been taken out twice to be questioned. General Pablo Giuseppi Monagas, who was imprisoned with M. Justo Arcia for one those mysterious plots which were hatched in the anti-rooms of Maracay, is back again in the court-yard. Neither Iturbe nor Giuseppi Monagas had anything to do with the « barracks' plot » Arcia's arrest was probably due to the fact that when he returned from La Guiara he was on the same boat as Iturbe, who

was coming back from a business trip to the East. Both were arrested and taken to the police barracks. They were kept there several days. A brother of Iturbe who is a well known doctor, was also arrested shortly afterwards. Iturbe was taken to La Rotonde on the grounds that the General had discovered that he was implicated in the conspiracy. Iturbe had shackles weighing seventy-five pounds attached to his feet. The same thing happened to Arcia but Juan Iturbe was released because he was in delicate health.

Aquiles has been governor of several important districts, Secretary General for the Pacifying Forces in 1903, he was governor of the Federal District and served as Minister of Justice. He was one of those who took part in the *Coup d'Etat* of December 19 which put Gomez into office and he had the fatal weakness, for which he has since been bitterly punished, to sacrifice the interests of his country on the altar of his personal friendship for Gomez as he had done for Castro. He was a man with a clear mind, well educated, a skilful negotiator like most men of his generation. And now he is a prisoner, a victim of the turn of fortune's wheel, with in the cell opposite to him, Dr Juan Jose Abreu who only recently he had had arrested and convicted.

Iturbe, who up till then had stood by and watched the decadence of the Republic by the «Gomezism», now in his turn has fallen a victim of that grotesque regime which like Saturn devours its own children. To say that he *fell* is not correct for, as a matter of fact he rose in public esteem when he won a place for himself among those whom out of class loyalty, by his birth, out of respect for a name which illuminates the chronicles of his country from the earliest time, he should never have deserted.

At the present time all the men who supported Gomez in December 1908 the only one on whom he can still count is Samuel Dario Maldonado, the bold and obstinate opponent of ex-président Castro. It was in reference to this that Gomez once said, « Dr Maldonado is the only of *them all* who has survived.

*Of them all.* By this he meant of all the group of friends who had carried him into office and whom he had rewarded by insults, by imprisonment, by exile, by death. Every one speaks lightly of « the men who serve Gomez » but they do not mention « those of whom Gomez takes advantage ». Let us grasp their hands in friendship, let us open our arms to them in welcome each time they repent and seek to redeem themselves.

General Pablo Giuseppi Monagas had been brought into the court-yard. Monagas was one of the supporters of Marquez Bustillos, « the link that binds us to civilizarion », as Monagas still declared in 1918. He is a grandson of Jose Tadeo Gregorio Monagas, one of the Liberators of Greater Colombia, ex-président of Venezuela usurper till 1849, and head of the ruling family till 1858. His great-uncle Jose Gregorio freed the slaves and paid a bitter price for the nepotism of his brother.

During his first confinement Giuseppi Monagas was also at La Rotonde. He was supposed to be dying at the time and begged the authorities out of charity, as no medecin was given him and as heart trouble made him fear that he might pass away any minute, to allow either of the priests Mendoza or Monteverde, who were in the neighboring cell, to come in and hear his confession. He was deeply religious and had sworn to his mother on her death-bed not do die without having confessed. It made a heart-rending scene. Several other prisoners urged that

his request be granted. It was refused and the only result was that those who has asked for a priest had double curtains instead of single ones nailed over their doors. Later in some way Giuseppi Monagas managed to get out.

We heard that now however he was very ill in cell n° 5, the cell where prisoners are « forgotten » in other words allowed to die by slow degrees. It was said that when threatened with torture he made certain statements which compromised Iturbe.

When the latter was questioned in the presence of Monagas he merely looked his accuser straight in the eyes and said « What would your grandfather think if he saw you doing such a thing as this ». The poor man bowed his head did and not utter another word.

Among other men shut in the filthy cells around the court-yard is General Francisco Jose Saez, of Alto Llano, His calm expression, the intelligent look in his one eye, he lost the other some time ago, recall to my mind the splendid carreer of this officer who was arrested without any reason in june 1918. He was outrageously insulted, reviled by the mob and dragged along the roads in irons, finally being thrown into the Rotonde with *grillos* weighing 75 pounds. Now he sits there warming himself in the sun. Suffering has set its seal on his features.

Following the changes that took place the other night the prisoners are now grouped as follows, cell 48 Iturbe, cell 47 General Roberto Gonzales and General Eduardo Sanchez, cell 16 Dr Abreu and Luciani, cell 45 Serrano the engineer, cell 41 Torres Abander, cell 43 is empty, cell 42 Lucas Manzano « Gonfalon », cell 41 Dr Juliac and I. General Juan Figueroa, another man who Don Juancho dislikes, had been brought from Ocumare and placed in cell 40. He is accused of having taken part in the

« barracks conspiracy » which failed. He is a man of a certain age, quiet in his demeanor, one of his legs is missing, having been cut off at the thigh. He has another in rubber but to walk he must use a cane. He replied in a dignified manner to the questions that Medina put to him yesterday.

« This is all I know. We had been invited to take part in a peaceful demonstration on the Place Washington in honor of the victory of Allies. Dr Pedro Manuel Ruiz and other friends had asked me to come with them. I went there quite as a matter of course and if I should be asked to go again I should certainly so if I was free.

« You don't recall any other little details at all ? asked Medina adopting a falsely sympathetic compassion manner.

« No I don't remember anything else. You can string me up by one paw, that is to say by the only one I have left, but you won't make me say anything else.

Whereupon Medina withdrew. I heard him mutter as he passed my cell, « If Don Juancho tells me to, I'll make him a whistle a different tune.

Now Nereo has taken Figueroa's cane and rubber leg away. The prisoner can therefore no longer stand up but is obliged to remain lying on the stone pavement. The day before yesterday the poor man had colic and was feverish. He kept calling for water and moaning.

« Warden, give me a drink of water. »

Nereo, swinging in his hammock, laughed and replied « Birds are smaller than you are but they know enough to go to the river when they are thirsty. Don't keep on annoying me, wooden leg. »

The next night when Porras made his rounds Figueroa begged for his rubber leg and his cane.

First they gave him back one, then the other. Nereo had told Porras that this man Figueroa was a dangerous character and might attempt to assault him.

One day when he had asked for some medicine and been told he could not have it Figueroa inquired of Porras. « Why don't they take off the name « Public Prison » from this building and call it instead « Public Slaughter house. »

The following day when an orderly brought him the slate on which the daily bills of what the prisoners owed for extra food and so forth were marked. Nereo announced.

« Figueroa — insolvent. »

Frequently when we would pool our pitifully small supplies in order to help the officers who were starving, the warder would cut off the extra rations of the prisoners who he suspected of sharing with others, and give as a reason that they were « insolvent. »

The prisoners on the lower tier decided to take steps to prevent the civilians and the soldiers who were being deliberately starved from succumbing to this dreadful death. One morning when Nereo happened to be out they all went into the middle of the court and from there bombarded the cells of the men who were being ill-treated with bits of bread, black sugar, bananas and anything else they happened to have.

We on the upper tier also decided to do something for these poor wretches. Juliac contributed a handkerchief and each of us dropped in our little gift consisting of a roll, a bit of cheese, a banana, some matches, a couple of cigarettes. Just as I was passing it along so that it could circulate among the cells on the right Nereo reappeared. The package lay between two cells out of reach for both Figueroa and myself.

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Nereo discovered it. What a prize ! A handkerchief full of eatables ! I watched him from my observation post. His black eyes sparkled. His face gleamed with joy, reminding me of a spider's delight catching a fly. He carefully put aside the « evidence in the case » and hurried off to denounce us to Medina. Shortly afterwards he returned and had cells n° 45 to 39 washed out. This meant throwing in pails of water which soaked us and to avoid which we had to climb on our planks. There was ten centimeters of water in each cell and the curtains having been mailed up, the dampness oozed out making us shiver with discomfort. Nevertheless the day after we started in again and took up another collection. And neither this time nor afterwards was the Cur able to catch us breaking the rules of the establishment.

Nereo quite frequently threw water at us especially days when he happened to be out of sorts. On such occasions anything was good enough as an excuse to ill-treat his « patients ».

« Listen N° 38 if you keep on shaking your curtain I'll give a hiding' »

Once Nereo caught « Don Luis » Arcia in n° 24 trying to pass out an empty match box into which he had slipped a paper for Iturbe asking for some medecin — for Iturbe was allowed to have some medecin sent in from outside. The warden fell on Arcia like a wild beast. We heard the sound of savages blows and the moans of the victim.

After he had finished at n° 24 he dashed over to Dr Iturbe's door and began to abuse him. Every day the gaoler was in the habit of telling Abreu and Juliac who are lawyers that « doctors » are robbers and thieves, that they sell their souls and that the reason he, Nereo, had been condemned for what he had done — the savage murder of his mistress — was merely

because he was poor. All of the prisoners no matter who they were are frequently insulted. If Nereo happened to be bored one of his amusements would be to go and ostentatiously wash his feet in the fountain, the water of which was then given us to drink.

Once or twice he came back from the other prison, La Rotonde for common-law criminals, very drunk and swaying from side to side. On such occasions he would lie down to sleep it off and we would be able to « correspond ». All of a sudden he would wake up and dash into the cells to discover what we were up to. When he entered my cell n° 41 he found the tenants peacefully playing on a brick that game which the Russian troops invented at Sebastopol. Our « men » were buttons we had torn off our clothes. If I took a nap my companion stayed on guard. We both slept a few minutes at noon to try to forget our hunger. The « grub » was served at three o'clock. From seven Dr Juliac gives me a course in law. He insists that he wants to make a district attorney out of me. Sometimes we talk about old days or ancient history. My comrade has read a great deal. He possesses a very keen mind. Many of his sayings have remained famous. For instance when Jose Felix Mora was Crespo's candidate at Carabobo Juliac, who was in the opposition, brought out a paper called « General Mora can never be governor » in order that the newsboys should cry that message all over the city. Juliac was the son of poor people but became Président of the State Supreme Court and Director of the Ministry of the Interior. A self-made man he established a happy and respectable home. Juliac was one of those « yellow liberals » the supporters of Crespo whom, as Rafael Maria Carabano has said, was the last leader of our Liberal party. Crespo had excel-

lent qualities which counterbalanced certain weaknesses.

Now there are two prisoners in almost all the cells and at the rate things are going there will soon be three or four. How to lodge more than eighty captives in 25 cells is a good deal of problem. Consequently we are frequently moved about and two or three men are put in together. I notice that Nero always keep two or three cells empty « in case of accidents », as he puts it.

\* \* \*

The tragic-comedy of the « barrack conspiracy » ended in a dramatic fashion, on March 1.

Several officers, greatly alarmed over what had become of their friends or relatives, heard that one of their companions who was on duty at the Palo Grande barracks has sworn to revenge his fellow soldiers and to reunite the various members of the conspiracy who were still free. He declared his intention of carrying out the plans that the traitor Pinero had made miscarry.

Tancredo Pimentel, the brother of Luis Rafael Pimentel who had been tortured and of Francisco Pimentel, was prepared to join in the movement. This was natural enough considering his own grief and that of his mother and sisters. He conferred with various people, convinced some that the time for action was at hand, persuaded others that the adventure would prove profitable one and held a series of meetings during which a man named Hernandez revealed a set of elaborate plans which he proposed should be put into execution at once. Some of those present thought the ideas absurd and that they would only result in still further compromising the

prisoners and increasing their sufferings. Whereupon Hernandez vehemently struck the table with his fist and declared that if no one would follow him he Hernandez, would single handed lead a mutiny of the non-commissioned officers and soldiers stationed at Palo Grande.

Matters were reaching a head when one night the conspirators received word to gather at a certain house at the crosse-roads of Camejo where Lieutenant Colonel Hernandez would meet them and prove to them once and for all how practical his projets were. They were also told that numerous important persons would attend the meeting. A certain number of the conspirators, out of curiosity turned up at the meeting place. They had taken advantage of the fact that it was Carnival time to disguise themselves in fancy dress.

The meeting was called to order. Hernandez who was presiding, seemed nervous and kept constantly looking at the door as though he expected to see some more of the conspirators or the new recruits come in.

Severel people wearing cloaks and masks entered.

« Come this way », said Hernandez.

Suddenly the newcomers threw aside their cloaks and the officers present found themselves looking into the muzzles of revolvers. A squad of police appeared in the doorway.

« You're our prisoners. »

Meanwhile Lieutenant Colonel Celestino Hernandez of the Venezuelan army had slipped out a side entrance. The next day he was rewarded and promoted.

This was the reason why Nereo had been keeping a couple of cells vacant. He had received instruction to be ready to lodge some new guests. The snare was prepared and sprung with the connivance of

authorities at police headquarters and engineered by some of their most capable sleuths such as Frias, Basilio Gabante, Tirado Medina etc.

The upshot of the adventure was that the same night Tancredo-Pimentel, Hernando de Castro, Roman Edo. Feo Calcano, Avelino Martinez and Santiago Siso Ruiz entered the Rotonde. Ruiz had just been called to the bar and was out in his automobile with his sister and fiancee when he was set on by four disguised policemen. He, as well as several of the others arrested, had not been present at the meeting organized by Hernandez, nevertheless he was considered implicated in the affair. He was placed in cell n° 13 which had been empty since the departure of Monseigneur Lobera. N° 42 which also free, as Lucas Manzano had been taken into the court-yard and released a few days later. Into this cell was thrown a law student Salvador de la Plaza who was taken prisoner while staying on his estate outside Caracas, at Rio Chico. He was brought in along with Narciso Ribas, another of don Juancho's prisoners.

New curtains were nailed up, new chains riveted on the prisoner's ankles. Nereo was furious. All night he hovered around, us, club in hand, waiting for the least excuse to strike at any one who dared show himself behind his curtain.

The so-called soup was worse than ever. It was nothing but hot water into which stale flour had been dropped. We only had one meal of corn meal apiece. One morning Plaza told me about his various adventures. He had been in hiding at Caracas with Pedro Brito and Pedro Zuloaga. Afterwards he fled to Le Tuy. He thought his friends managed to leave the country.

Shortly after these arrivals had come in, and

before Manzano was released, we heard one morning the familiar cry « Get into your cells ». Our hearts beat faster. Did it mean new prisoners were coming in or that some were to be released ?

Who do we see enter accompanied by the usual escort and wear in enormous black grillos — Miguel Rocha the well known journalist who was on the staff of *El Universal*.

The reason for his being sent to prison was supremely ridiculous. That very day he had been watching a electric news-sign which functioned just outside of his office. The despatch read « President Wilson returns from Europe. The Divorce of Gomez Carrillo. Rocha was reading the news as he stood in the crowd and when he saw the second despatch he made the comment « For once he has done something Gomez... Carrillo. He happened to cough just then and there was a pause between the last words. A spie overheard him and half an hour later Rocha was thrown into cell № 40 at La Rotonde with seventy pounds of iron rivetted to his ankles and not the slightest idea of what he had done or said to get him there.

All of the twenty-six little cells on the upper tier now hold two or three prisoners. We are all hungry. Nereo has just been beating Garciita most savagely. The orderlies are not allowed to come upstairs unless Nereo is with them. During his afternoon visit Porras made some mysterious remarks to the warder in a low voice pointing to certain cells as he spoke. The prisoners on the lower tier no longer dare go out in the court-yard. Every few minutes Nereo insults them or calls them to order. He tells the priest.

« Mendoza drop your curtain. Do the same, you little old Monteverde ».

« Frijolito I've got my eye on you ». (This remark is addressed to Dr Nestor Luis Perez).

« The Delgados are under-arrest and are declared insolvent because they threw bread to the men above them. » (This refers to the brothers Delgado-Chalbaud).

To be arrested and then rearrested. That reminds one of the conjurer who puts a little nut in a big one, the big nut in a prune, the prune in an apple, the apple in a cocoanut, the cocoanut in a water-melon. Here you have one inside the other, the Republic, the city, the prison, the enclosure where the Rotonde is situated, the cell, the curtain outside the door, and by way of an extra treat, a pair of *grillos*.

Arevalo Gonzales who has just been arrested, protested indignantly from his cell.

« But they didn't do anything wrong. »

As a matter of fact his protest is justified. But Nereo nailed up his curtain and since then Arevalo has not stirred out of his cell. When Nereo rescinded his own sentence and told Gonzales he could go out, the prisoner turned his back on the gaoler. He seems to have made up his mind obstinately to go without light or air, proving thereby his sympathy for the prisoners on the upper tier by sharing our martyrdom

One of his companions muttered « That is a silly idea of Arevalo. »

To which another prisoner replied indignantly.

« Nothing that happens to us matters any more. Nereo can do as he pleases, nobody will say a word. »

From below a timid voice calls out,

« Be careful what you say. »

And another one of the younger men exclaims,

« We should all be ashamed of ourselves. »

Whether we are ashamed or not we are certainly all of us hungry. It is a bitter, drawing hunger that

increases through the endless days, the sleepless nights, that creeps from our bellies to our brains, as a stray cat creeps over cold ashes. We feel a throbbing in our temples, the gnawing of a little rat echoes in our ears, our throat tightens up and when we hear the sound of plates being washed below or sniff the imaginary odor of a dish being served somewhere else, moisture drips from the corner of our lips. Pictures of happier hours pass before our eyes, the rythm of majestic lines of poetry thunder in our brain, our memory plays strange tricks on us evoking episodes of the past, dates from history, tales of happier days.

Juliac recites, as he would a monologue, Cervantes, account of the wedding feast of Camacho, «as he said this he produced a great sauce-pan, from which he drew three chickens and two geese. He placed them on Sancho's plate saying as did so' Eat these odds and ends my friend while waiting for the real feast to begin ! »

« Oh shut up », I exclaim crossly, « try and sleep, take a drink of water, but whatever you do don't talk about eating any more ».

The clock strikes one. We have two more hours to wait for the wretched stinking broth. The minutes drag on as we sink gradually into a state of lethargy.

At last we hear as in a dream the rattle of plates and a cheery voice. How sweet is the voice of Nero when he cries out.

« You're in luck, boys, today. Here's your soup and as surprise a piece of chicken for each of you ».

We eagerly stretch our hands underneath the curtain. Before saying a word we swallow what is handed us namely as sort of slimy mess of stale flour baked as a paste. Tears of anger run down our cheeks and we flavor our rations with the salt of grief and disappointment.

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## CHAPTER XXVII

The mysterious epidemic of dysentery. — The swan-song of Torres Abandero. — Grey days and mournful hours. The murder of Luis Aranguren Moreno. — His sufferings, despair and death.

I spent my time lying on the floor, chin in hand watching the blue bloods of Dario go by or noticing through the little hole in the curtain how Dominguez Acosta, who sat every day besides the little tress in the court-yard, seemed be wasting away in a sort of extatic swoon. Spinetti could hardly walk any more. Above us in his cell Araguren Moreno scribbled little notes telling us that he and his companions were all suffering from diarrhoea, the attacks of which presented some unusual symptoms such as headaches and fainting fits. He also informed us that the food served them had a metallic taste and that it was Nereo who personally collected the empty plates.

Torres Abandero in cell N<sup>o</sup> 41 looked very ill. The other day when Nereo was not there he showed us one of his legs. It was swollen and covered with ulcers. Although Abandero felt that death was draw-

ing near he composed some charming love poetry,

« Vida mia ya estoy viejo  
pero aun tengo juventud  
la del mosto que en la cuba  
acendra y hierva la uva  
gusta mas y da salud. »

The other night he received a little basket of good thing from his home. He and one or two others were allowed this privilege. They always shared a part of what they had with their companions. But it was difficult to divide half a pound of cheese into fifteen or twenty parts. Once they gave me an entire sausage. It lasted me nearly six months. I hung it up on a string and when my rations of swill and rotten peas was brought me I would dip my sausage in so as to give them some taste. When I had used up every bit of it like this I ate the skin. Torres Abandero is as kind and simple as a child. Every now and then in the midst of his pain he exclaims.

« At any rate I'm still alive. »

Unfortunately nothing is being done to have him released.

We hear that in N° 47 General Roberto Gonzales is ill with a very bad sore throat. Dr Abreu who is sick with dysentery has been set free.

A sort of tragic resignation began to come over us after the long days we spent in our shackles, suffering from hunger and bad food, our bones chafed with our irons. Curt answers and violent protests become more and more infrequent. It was like a dead calm before a storm. Some of the prisoners spent whole days without saying a word, others devoured anything rotten or filthy in the way of food that others had refused to touch as though they were trying deliberately to poison themselves.

The other night Luis Pimentel slashed one of his arteries with a Gillette razor blade which one of the orderlies had loaned him to cut his nails with. His companion Aponte held him down and disarmed him while calling Nereo and the guard to come to the rescue. For the first time I heard pity in our gaoler's voice when he said to the wounded man.

« Don't despair. Try and keep your courage up. Be patient, my boy. There's an end to everything in this world. »

Pimentel's life has become positively hellish. His wounds, the result of the tortures inflicted on him, hurt terribly, he has been placed on specially short rations and all the hirelings make him a particular target for their ill-treatment. He is considered to have been the military head of the conspiracy and the death circle is drawing tighter and tighter around his throat. But the rest of the prisoners have decided that, as long there is a breath of life left in our own bodies, we will do everything we can to keep Pimentel and the other officers from dying.

Pimentel was the head of the military mission from Venezuela that visited Peru. There he became engaged to a young lady of excellent family. The one thing one can criticize in his conduct is that he did not blow Pineros' brain out when he realized the latter intended to betray our plans. Pimentel explains this on the grounds that at the time, Pineros swore he would not take part himself in the rising, but neither would he tell anyone about what was going on. Those who know Pimentel can understand his attitude in this matter. He is the soul of honor and a gentleman in the best sense of the word by birth and education. The other man is a rascally adventurer, a hanger on of gambling dens and brothels.

Pimentel's companion in prison to whom he was

chained was Manuel Maria Aponte. Shortly before his arrest Aponte had married. His wife was pregnant. He had no news of her or whether their child had yet been born. Reserved, serious and calm Aponte took life as it came. If there was anything to eat he ate it, if there was not he kept quiet, he never complained. He was a man.

There are others who have not his self-control. Some humble themselves before their goalers, others become angry and lose their tempers. Some are stronger willed. For instance there is the case of Captain Miguel Parra. His young brother Cristobal, who was little more than a boy, went crazy with hunger and threatened unless we gave him some of our food, he would tell Nereo that we communicated through the walls of our cells. Miguel Parra sent word to him from the cell where he lay very ill himself.

« Don't dare to do such a thing. At least try and die like a man. »

Another officer whom one cannot help feel sorry for is Captain Anibal Molina. One of his legs has become paralysed. His comrades try to console him but he merely keeps on moaning and the sound of his groans haunt you. Arturo Parra's cousin, Lieutenant Jorge Ramirez R., who was tortured, is very low indeed. He hardly speaks any more. Parra was not tortured but was the victim of a dastardly move on the part of his enemies. At the time of the conspiracy he was ill at the military hospital and knew nothing about it. When brought before the police he was asked to state why his cousin had become compromised in the plot. Indignantly, and not thinking how his words might be interpreted Parra exclaimed,

« If Lieutenant Ramirez is in danger all I can ask for is to be allowed to share his lot. »

At once he was taken to where the instruments

of torture had been prepared and told that unless he confessed what he knew about the plot he would be hung up by the testicles. Parra seized the ropes from which still hung the bloody shreds of flesh torn from those who has preceded him and replied,

« These things other men have endured. If I declare I know nothing about the plot it is because that is the truth, not because I fear what you may do to me. I will not lie in order to escape torture. »

His bravery saved him. Parra is tall, thin, dark and seems suspicious of those about him. His voice is low and deep and he pauses between each word he utters, as a man crossing a stream picks his way from stone to stone.

An incident that happened to Second-Lieutenant Pedro Betancourt-Grillet gives an idea of the psychology of Gomez' son.

When the latter threatened Betancourt-Grillet at the Villa Zoila that the Lieutenant would be tortured unless he « came through with the straight dope », in other words unless he denounced his friends, the officer is said to have replied,

« I cannot believe, general, that you would dishonor the uniform you wear by such an act. »

The infamous rascal leaped to his feet in a furious rage and exclaimed,

« Well, if you don't believe it now I'll pretty soon make you do so. »

The threat was carried out. The officer was stripped of his coat, a gag was placed on his mouth and a sort of strait-jacket, the sleeves of which were fastened tightly about the neck, was slipped over his body. When hanging, head downwards, suspended by his genital organs, the unhappy wretch tried to stretch out his hand and rest it on the ground the

index finger snapped as though it had been made of card-board.

Jose Agustin Badaracco, another of the officers confined here is also in a very low state of health.

July,

The mid-summer heat bakes the prison. Diseases grow worse and more frequent. Some of the prisoners have consumption, others liver trouble, others dysentery. As a result of the weight of his chains Iturbe develops a hernia. Finally a bandage is given him. Delgado-Chalbaud, who has the same complaint, can no longer raise his legs weighed down by the heavy bar of his *grillos*. But instead of giving him lighter ones the authorities as a special favor put his bedding on the floor so that he can lie down more easily.

We are crushed by the heat, the mournful litany of the incessant complaints of our fellow-prisoners, the despair of seeing day after day go by without bringing the least improvement in our lot. We let ourselves rot away silently. If one can manage to satisfy one's hunger one does so, if not one drinks water, tries to sleep and abandons oneself to fate. The reveille sounds at five o'clock. Lights out blows at eight. No noise is allowed after nine. Formerly when the prisoners, or at least those in the lower tier who were allowed to walk about the court, felt cheerful, they stood at the doors of their cells and chatted till the last bugle blew. Now they are indoors by six o'clock. One of the orderlies is trying to learn to write. He practises on a slate with a wretched lamp to see by. Another lies on the ciment pavement near where the pool gives out a little coolness. Sometimes a man belches, the protest of an empty stomach, or

the symptom of some intestinal trouble. Sometimes chains rattle. Nereo lifts his head from his pillow and listens. He never makes a mistake as to where the sound comes from. He identifies each of the 50 cells perfectly.

« Hie there n° 27 ! don't rattle your chains like that ! You're disturbing my beauty sleep.

\* \* \*

Midnight, silence. Unbroken except by deep breathing of those who are asleep or the low moans of those who are in pain. Occasionally a sudden cry, it may be a nightmare, it may be delirium.

« Nereo Paccheco has said that he would stab General Medina », that is Parraga's voice. He is suffering from another fit of insanity. He goes on,

« Yes, he has said he would kill him the first chance he got. » Nereo jumps to his feet,

« You can't fool me making believe you're cuckoo. Somebody told you to say that. You'll see what I'll do to you. »

Parraga replies, « Listen to Nereo Pacheco. He says he'll kill me. And then he'll kill Medina.

Nereo, furious, and alarmed by the madman's cries, which doubtless the soldiers and officer on guard duty can hear quite plainly, rushes into Parraga's cell, tries to quiet him, gives him water to drink and remarks in loud voice,

« What silly nonsense he's talking. Colonel Parraga has had another attack. It must be on account of the moon. »

The next day the same dreary atmosphere surrounds us, the same loathing of our lot, the same despair of ever escaping from it.

\* \*

Towards the last of August Perucho Betancourt in cell 38 transmitted to us a little message marked « secret and confidential ». It read as follows « Do not if possible send us anything except bananas. Aranguren (his cell-mate) is very low and he even tries to eat the rations of rotten peas. Although I am not ill I prefer not to have anything to eat myself as the sight of food would only annoy him, and by preventing his seeing any food we can perhaps keep him on a diet. »

Aranguren has been ill for several days. His character has become disagreeable. Previously he used to say amusing things. Now every remark he makes is tinged with bitterness. Poor young fellows. They are only sixteen or seventeen years old. Linked together by an iron bar, almost naked, with nothing but the ground to lie on and nothing to live on except the bits of food that their comrades can smuggle in to them. How brave and steadfast they are compared with those wretches beings who torture children like that, who wrack their bodies with inhuman instruments of torture and who, if they themselves have a belly-ache, insist on having all the doctors of Caracas to look after their precious health and all the drugstores of the Federal District to send them medicines.

September 3,

« How are things going with you ? »

« About the same as usual » answers Perucho in a weak voice.

« How is Aranguren ? »

« Getting ready to pack up and move on, »

answers the man referred to in firmer tones than his comrade, who adds hastily,

« My friend is trying to make the best of things But he is not at all well. »

We understand. There is nothing we can do. On the morning of September 4, he was very feverish and delirious. The fever came and went. He could not digest food and said that his intestins felt as though they were all loose and dissolved, and that all his muscles ached if he had cramps in them.

On the evening of the next day Bettancourt-Grillet called to Porras as he passed behind the curtain. Aranguren said to the inspector,

« Colonel Porras. I have a message for General Medina. Tell him that when I was officer of the guard on duty at La Rotonde I knew his children and petted them. Now that I am dying I implore him for their sake to let me see a priest before I die.

His voice was broken, gasping, quite evidently the voice of a very sick man. Porras was evidently surprised, but he replied in suave tones.

« Very well I will give the General your message ». He went out and closed the grating.

The death agony of Second-Lieutenant Luis Aranguren-Moreno began at eleven o'clock. Before he lost consciousness he spoke in a firm, almost clear, voice. Perucho reminded him of his religious obligations. As he was apparently not going to be allowed to confess to one of the priests who were among his fellow prisoners, Monteverde for instance or Mendoza, Perucho urged him to pray. This made the dying man angry.

« Why should I pray. There is, there can be, no God. If there was one He would not allow things like this to happen. I can't believe in all that rubbish. Leave me alone.

His comrade, bound to Arangura by the same pair of *grillos*, held his head, wiped his brow, did what he could to ease his pain. They had no light in their cell. We tossed them bits of our candles, till Nereo called out from his hammock.

« Stop that. The rules of the establishment forbid prisoners having any light in thir cells after nine o'clock. »

« But Aranguren is dying. Don't you realize that? » exclaimed Perucho. Other prisoners begged Nereo to be merciful.

« What a fuss they make », remarked the brute, « as though a man needed light to die by. »

In the end however he himself took a candle from Siso or Torres Abandero and went to cell 38. I lifted a corner of my curtain and through the crack managed to catch a glimpse of the two lads. Their hair had grown long and fell on their shoulders. One of them gasping for breath, lay on the kness of the other who held the candle which Nereo had given him. The gaoler at the same time warned Perucho to keep the light hidden as much as possible as the inspector might punish him for allowing a prisoner to have it. As a matter of fact the officer on duty did lean down over the court-yard and call out,

« Put out that light. »

Nereo answers quietly « It's for one of them who's dying. »

The officer turned away, we heard his boots stamping about on the terrace over our heads. In vain Perucho tried to make his comrade pray. Sometimes he was able to persuade Aranguren to repeat the beginning of the Lord's Prayer, which is the prayer he remembered best.

« Our father who art in Heaven...

« ... who art in Heaven » answers the dying man in a feeble whisper.

But when they reach the phrase « as we forgive those who trespass against us » Aranguren shook his irons angrily and mutteres, « Certainly not. Certainly not. »

They finished that prayer and begun the « Hail Mary. »

Suddenly Perucho stops and announced in a frightened voice, hardly able to keep back his tears.

« His eyes are already becoming glassy. »

We hear him speaking tenderly and with deep emotion to his friend.

« My little lad, you are going away and I'll be all alone. »

Aranguren exclaims. « I want to recite the Credo. Perucho say it for me. »

« I don'd know it very well, Luis. »

« Ask the Marquis (as we called Chaumer who had been very kind to him) if he knows it. »

Chaumer deeply moved begins, in the darkness, to recite the solemn phrases from his cell, while all of us repeat mentally the words after him.

« I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth. »

And Aranguren torn by conflicting emotions, the desire to pray, a revolt against his fate, the terror of death, interrupts him.

« No, no I don't believe in anything. Gomez ! curse Gomez ! If there is a God, as you says there is, may that God dam him for all eternity. »

Perucho, gently, quietly puts a hand over his friend's mouth and repeats the sentence which Chaumer has just said.

« Be quiet Luis. Pray. I believe in Jesus-Christ his only son ! » ..... « his only son. »

But again Luis stops. He will not go on and, after a few moments silence probably following some thought in his own mind, he cries out.

« What a Nero he is, worse than a Nero even ! A thousand times worse ! »

Perucho tries to calm him and insists that he shall repeat the last phrase « Who will come to judge the quick and the dead. »

But Aranguren will not, cannot answer. He is beyond the vale of human suffering. While he gasps out his last breaths, we hear his intestines gurgle as though one was emptying a half filled tin-can. Now he lies there, a pale sack of discolored skin and bone. The sky has begun to brighten. The last star quenches its timid rays. The clock in a distant tower chimes six. Another clock in the Governor's quarter answers it. Absorbed by the ghastly drama that went on in our midst we did not hear the reveille blow over our heads at five o'clock. It is cold but no one feels the chill in the air. All of us crouch against our curtains. We listen to Perucho weeping over the body of his friend and fellow martyr.

« You are at peace, little Luis. When will I too sleep my last sleep. »

We intervene to console his despair. He becomes calmer. Porras passes by on his regular rounds and stops for a moment to look at the tragic picture. They bring the hammer and the anvil to separate the living from the dead. It is a quarter to seven. There is the same ceremony as before. The body is sewn in a sack. It is carried out and creoline is scattered on the spot where it lay. That makes the second.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII

Howers of sin. — The curse in the dark. — How Jorge Ramirez died. — From Seneccats Jesus. — Annibal Molina, the fourth on the list. — „ Juan de Abila ” and the modern novel. — All Soul's Day. — The tragic meeting. — A last piece of advice. — Our Lady of starvation. — A pigeon, not on toast. On the eve of a New Year.

*October-december 1919,*

This atmosphere of passive resistance, this dull dreary melancholy pierced occasionaly by sudden, swift tragedies or brutal provocations and insults wears down our nerves. That is why men who you think are sane suddenly begin to do and think mad things, while others, who have the reputation of being brave, speak in humble tones and even cringe before the terrors of the night. Those who are simple minded, not very well educated, become absurdly superstitious. On the other hand one sometimes finds a different type of man courageously accepting his daily ration of pain with smiling serenity, cleaning his pair of grillos cheerfully, decorating his cell, fixing up his food as tastily, in short living as comfortably as he can and reserving his energies for the day when he wll be able to use his strength to the best purpose.

The prisoners in the lower tier can read, write or study. Up above we are shut in a twofold prison, that of our cell and that of our thoughts. Some months ago one of my neighbors, Santiago Siso, secured in some way or other a few sheets of the book called *Los Pazos de Ulloa* by Emilia Pardo-Bazan. Page by page we read them over again and again, enjoying to the full the delightful writing of this Galician authoress. Afterwards Plaza obtained a book on Southern Africa by Marcel Monet which also was passed about in fragments, while Rocha and Figueroa allowed me to share in their readings of Jean Aicard's *Benjamine*. Up till then I had only had in the way of literature, the pathetic or melancholy letters of my comrades, the humorous stories of Jobito, the poems of Leo, the socialogical or historical studies of Luciani, and an amazing avalanche of verses by poor Torres Abanderos whose poetic gifts, fanned by the suffering he endured, flamed up with the brillancy of a light that is about to be extinguished.

The prisoners who were in solitary confinement and had no other companion than their thoughts, their vain hopes of release, sank into a state of lethargy or else went mad. I have never before realized how true was the expression of Cicero « literature is the honey that sweetens the bitterness of life. » Those who are not able to draw upon those resources which knowledge offers sink day by day into black pits of despair from which the only release is the dreadful portal of insanity or death.

Up till now my companion and I have taken refuge in discussions or conversations on philosophic, literary, or political themes. This intellectual comradeship makes us willing to accept the little annoyances of every day. After having spent long months

with a man in the same cell a state of friction is likely to develope which begins with hostile silences, rapidly degenerating into absurd and violent quarrels. In some of the cells the prisoners are on the point of flying at one another's throats. The only thing that restrains them in Nereo's obvious delight when anything of the kind occurs. The other prisoners try and reconcile them. After a time the tension wears off and once more they are prepared to accept and share their common lot in a spirit of brotherly comradeship.

I spend much time planning out novels. I make notes which I jot down with a wretched pencil on odd bits of crumpled paper. These are passed from one cell to another. They form our daily reading matter. I am urged to hurry up with the next instalment. I feel encouraged by the thought that I am able to help my companions to escape for a few hours into that dream world which I have created and peopled with my fancy. It was perhaps that feeling that provoked certain vigorously optimistic passages in the « *Visitador de las Concepciones.* »

Nevertheless this life, side by side, becomes impossible. Juliac has decided to ask the governor to be placed in another cell. The release of some. the death of others, has thinned our ranks. Several cells are empty, among them n° 25.

Last night in the silence that falls after nine o'clock lieutenant Ramirez R. suddenly cried out.

« Please God that this consumption and dysentery that are killing us off may start a plague that will do away with Gomez, Caracas and all Venezuela. »

No one answered him. Here and there in the darkness one heard the creaking of a *grillos* or the chirping of a cricket as that innocent insect uttered

his love call. The sound reminds us of the country side, grasses waving on the river bank, the sweet calm of nights spent among one's family in the stillness of the slumbering landscape.

When the insect ceases his song the rattle of the irons take on a still more sinister note.

October 6 1919,

From the left comes the rumor that Ramirez has just passed away. He died silently. Nereo came with the hammer and, with the help of the orderlies, prepared the body « for freedom ». For the last few days Nereo has had an assistant, a little negro call Manuel Jose Borges from Le Tuy who previously had been in the court-yard with Ordaz and the other political prisoners. Nereo had Borges sent here because he plays *las maracas* and can accompanys the gaoler avery night, after lights-out, or during the long afternoon when Nereo plays his *joroppos*. Borges seems like a good sort of chap. He protects his compatriot Ribas, who is in n° 42, and, when he can do so without running any risk, he tries to do any other fravors in his power. If Nereo is about of course Dorges makes a fuss and acts the part of a pitiless bully. When, however, the question of carrying out the dead man comes up the poor boy turned grey with fright and his knees shake. After the corpse had been removed Nereo insisted that his assistant accompany him on *las maracas* while he plays a *joropo*. The thin notes of the native instruments tinkled like the faint rattling of a skeleton's bones dancing a dance of death and the singer's voice at time became hoarse with grief as he glanced upward superstitiously at the cells which death has left empty.

Each time a prisoner dies the ration of food served us becomes more abundant. It seems as though the cooks in the prison, or whoever dishes out our supplies, pitied those on whom this final punishment falls, after all the other ill-treatment they have gone through.

The other day Nereo entered our cell accompanied by two orderlies.

« Come on, doctor Juliac, put your arms around my neck we are going for a trip. »

Hesitatingly Juliac eyed the orderlies who prepared to pick up his pitifully small bagage.

« But where are you taking me ? » he asked.

Nereo, in order to frighten him and amuse the orderlies, answered.

« Never mind that, Don't ask questions. But I suggest you say you last prayers. »

He went out with Juliac, followed by the men carrying the packages and placed the prisoner in cell n° 25 opposite mine. Now we have the whole width of the courtyard between us after having been together for eight months. It made us feel badly to separate, but it was best we should do so. I set about feverishly tidying up my cell. With a piece of tin I tried to scratch off the bloody stains made by those who had coughed the hearts out here, I scrubbed the floor and the plank with ashes and water. Over the wall at the entrance I carved my name, and on the back wall I drew with charcoal a cross and beside it, clearly visible, the consoling message of the philosopher from Cordova.

« Post mortem, Nihil ipsaque mors nihil. »

Since Anibal has been alone in his cell, his companion having died, he cannot leave us a moment's peace. One of his legs is paralyzed and he complains in heart-breaking tones that he cannot get off his plank

and that, when an orderly does lift him down, he cannot get back. He drags himself about the cell, puts his head out the door and beseeches us to do something for him, in the name of our mothers, our children, our grandchildren. He calls on General Medina, the Trinity, Nereo, the Holy Virgin to come to his rescue, to let him see a priest, and not leave him to die like a wounded beast in the midst of his own filth. But it is all of no avail.

On October 25 Porras went by.

« Colonel Porras, I am really very ill », declared Anibal, « I cannot move, I can hardly speak. »

« I will mention it to the General. »

The inspector went out and locked the grating. About eleven o'clock the poor little man began to whimper again. I happened to be awake and heard him. At five Nereo come around knocking on the walls to wake us so we can answer his surly question.

« How have you been sleeping ? »

Some grunt a reply. Others sleep on or make believe snore.

One man answers in a tone what makes you wish you were free so you kick him hard.

« Very well, thank you, and you ? »

But as the warden does not lift the curtain of those confined on the upper tier, any more than Porras does when he passes by a little later, the question is rather a set phrase than a real inspection,

Thus it happened that, when the rations had been distributed and Molina's dish had remained outside his curtain without the prisoner's hand having stretched through to take it, Nereo called the orderly and said,

« Here take the soup in to that fellow. He said yesterday he can't move. »

Carias entered the cell. He went over to the plank on which the officer lay.

« Captain Molina, Captain Molina here's your *rancho*. »

Nereo from the court-yard called up ironically,

« Is it true he can't move ? »

« Oh yes, it's true, all right. »

« Why not ? »

« Because he's dead ! »

When he came out the orderly angrily threw the plate of rations on the ground. That makes four.

\* \* \*

Molina died on October 26. During the eleven days that have elapsed since then I have worked with the greatest activity. Pieces of paper for me to write on come from both right and left. Carias brings a practically new pencil as a present from Roman Delgado Chalbaud. Dominguez Acosta offers, through Siso, to keep the pages for me after I finish writing them. I slip the first packages to him although it is difficult to do so. Santiago Siso has been most kind and obliging ever since he found out that I was here.

November 2,  
All Souls' Day.

Eleven o'clock in the morning and things still look dim and grey. It is raining. All the church bells are ringing. Threads of rain drops break up the surface of the pool. The waper-spouts sob. The pigeons on the pillars sink their heads on their chests and arch their backs, they, like other birds when it is raining, look as though they were wearing a heavy cloak over their shoulders.

November 7,

« And how are you getting along ? » I inquired in deaf and dumb alphabet from the prisoners on the extreme right.

Slowly a pale hand slips through the curtain of cell 28 and spells out the following message.

« Badaracco is dying. »

At two in the afternoon we began to hear the deep snores that indicate profound slumber. It was indeed profound for, seven hours later, at nine o'clock one was not able to wake him. He had passed away in his sleep. From then on the dead man remained lying at the feet of his comrade bound by the same chain. It was not till the next morning that Nereo separated them and carried out the rigid corpse of Jose Augustin Badacacco wrapped in a dirty shroud.

That makes five.

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It is now the beginning of December. The two Parra Entrena brothers are very low. Captain Miguel, the elder, at times loses consciousness, while his brother Cristobal, a mere boy of seventeen or eighteen, is half mad with despair and hunger. He accuses his neighbors of stealing and devouring the provisions that are sent him and threatens that he will betray our « telephones », as we call our system of communication between the cells.

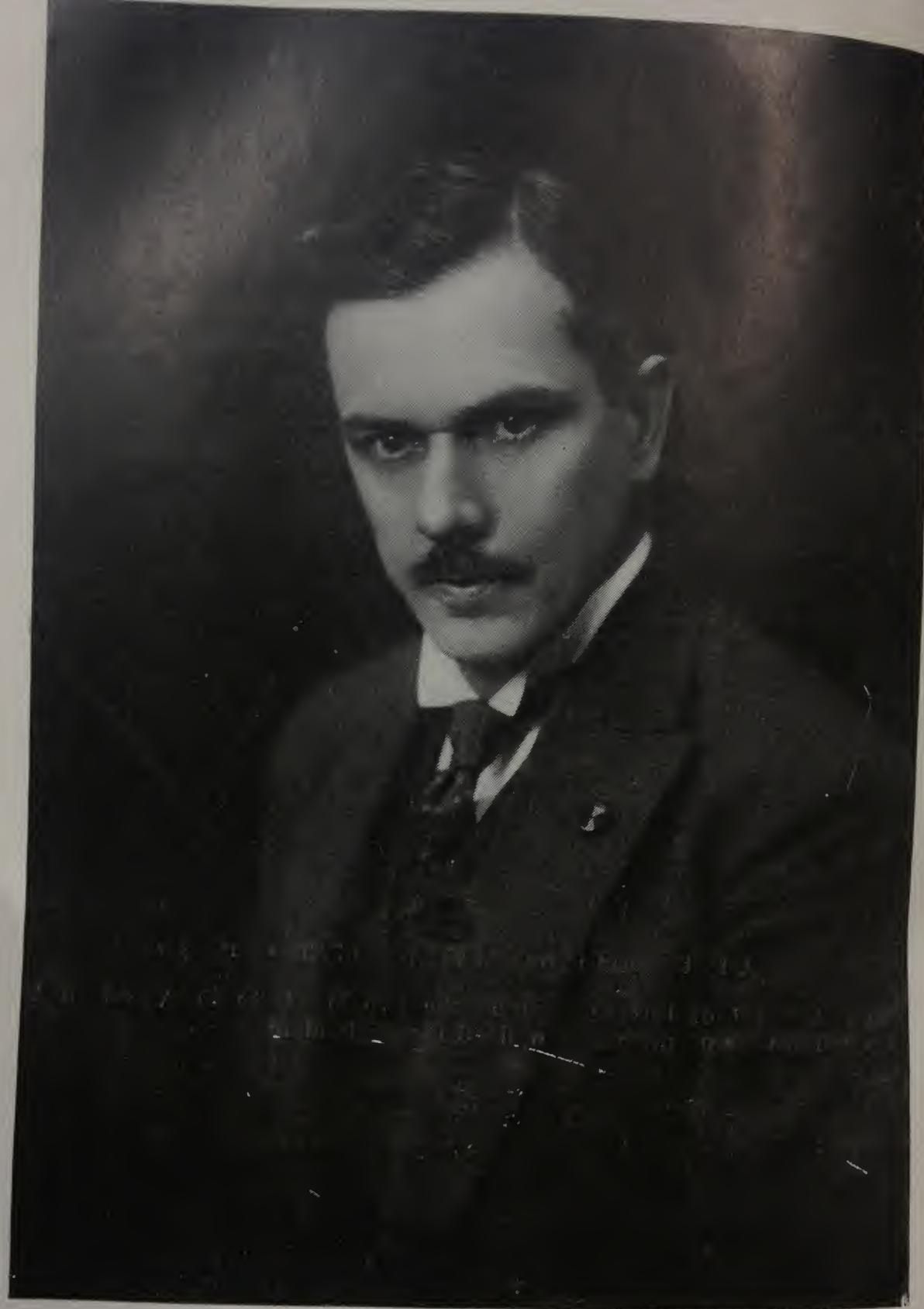
One night Nereo left the court-yard at an unusual time of night. The grating was opened for him. He was taken to see the governor. In prisons, as in convents and hospitals, everything that happens is known to all the inmates. An ear is listening at

The in  
Castro an



A foot placed in one of the ring of the « Grilles »

The instrument of torture used by the two latest South American tyrants  
Castro and Gomez on prisoners confined for political motives.



R. DELGADO-CHALBAUD

Thrown into the prison of La Rotonde at Caracas by Juan Vicente Gomez on May 13, 1913. He remained there confined to his cell fourteen years wearing leg-irons weighing over eighty-five pounds and cut off from all communication with his family or the outside world.

every keyhole. In the gover's office Nereo found a stout man in a heavy overcoat who was with the Medina and a third person. The man in the overcoat inquired.

« How many are left ? »

The goaler gave the number of prisoners who were still alive and named those who had already died.

« Very well. When you have *finished them off*. General Medina will tell you what to do next. »

Nereo was promised that, in case the verdict in his case which was now being reviewed by the judges should be unfavorable, he would be given the opportunity to escape to Trinidad or Curacao with the necessary funds and a false passport but « those tramps must disappear first. »

« Those tramps » meant the officers and the other prisoners. When Nereo had gone out to execute the orders he had received the man in the over-coat came down-stairs. He passed in front of the sentries, who saluted him, and stepped into the car belonging to the Inspector General of the Army which was driven by the chauffeur Pablo Vicente.

The enthusiasm with which Nereo has sent about his task wes something frightful. He no longer shouts at us. He no longer threatens us. He is silent and sinister. Carefully he nails each curtain in place, sewing up the holes so as to make them perfectly tight. Then he calls his orderlies together in the middle of the court and makes them a short speech. His voice trembles with rage although he does his best to make it sound amiable.

« Now get this, boys. I've had fresh order from General Medina that the rules of this establishment must strictly obeyed. This means you. If I catch anybody passing extra rations to a prisoner or let-

ting him have some of his own grub I'll beat him into a jelly with this club, I'll stick a pair of *grillos* on him and put him away with the guys who are on the upper floor. Now don't you forget that; »

Running his eye along the lines of cells, over each of which hung the shadow of death, Nereo added

« From now on everybody is « insolvent. »

« Does that include me ? » inquires Iturbe in a voice he tries to keep steady but which trembles because he realizes what this sentence means to him and those whom he helps secretly. »

« Yes, doctor, you are included. »

In short our death sentence has been signed.

\* \* \*

Starvation stalks in our midst. Hunger and silence, that silence which Tacitus mentions when he describes Rome during the burial of Germanicus. Only the pigeons are as before, coming and going, warming themselves in the sun, taking their baths, making love.

The sight of these creatures, free, happy, unconstrained in any way becomes unbearable. Lying on the floor I look up at the roof with its semi-circular vaulting on which the dampness and replastering have drawn lines that seem like maps or faces, or obscene images. The Song of Hunger echoes in my bowels and obsesses my mind. I hear Lara reciting the classic recipes for preparing certain delicious dishes.

« Place in a sauce-pan an ample layer of butter which is then melted over a slow fire. Scatter on this a first layer of macaroni with which one has mixed some parmesan cheese, grated fine... »

Some of the prisoners call out.

« For God's sake, shut up. »  
But Lara continues solemnly.  
« To prepare the real *potée de canard*, you take a duck... »

It is now literally three days since I have eaten a mouthful. What little rice is given us floats in a slimy juice the sight, as well as the smell, of which turns my stomach. Lara goes on, pitilessly.

« Add white wine, olives, dry grapes, Brazil nuts and stir slowly... »

As no one is allowed anything from outside some of the prisoners are devouring everything within their reach even banana skins. The pigeons roam about picking up seeds, or grains of rice that have fallen into the cracks of the floor in front of the cells.

« The white meat of the duck is generally considered...

I make a sudden spring like a tiger. Swiftly, with an ease that astonishes me, my hand shoots out under the curtain. When I draw it back, a second later, it has grasped a palpitating, heaving little mass of feathers. Everything is done in a flash. My hands are no longer human, they have become claws. I strangle the little bird. Its wings fall limply and the coraline eyes disappears under lids that flutter in a final spasm. I carry it to the back of my cell. There I rapidly strip the feathers from the frail body and hide them carefully.

My stomach contracts. This warm, white flesh, with its blue veins and delicate pink spots maddens me. With teeth and nails I tear off the wings, sever the muscles, wrench out the entrails. I clean them all as best I can and I devour glutto nously everything I can find to eat on the little beast. The only thing I put aside, intending to throw

it away later is a bit of tough skin that I cannot swallow.

The next day I ate the rest.

*December 28,*

Today I have had a wonderful, glorious surprise. I am overjoyed. One of my fellow prisoners tells me he can send a message to my mother, who is a friend of his family. Although he has not obtained the permission to have some one else enclose a note in his letter he thinks he can slip a message through.

It is almost a year since I have had any news of my family or been able to communicate with them.

But something troubles me, spoils my happiness. The mate of the pigeon I ate sits alone on one of the pillars on the roof. She seems sad. None of the other pigeons go near her. Is it because they respect her grief or because a melancholy person is never attractive? At any rate she mourns her mate and lingers by the spot where she loved and was loved. Poor little victim of unkind fate.

She sat there for a week. This morning she lay dead at the foot of her pillar. I feel annoyed. And cannot get over it.

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At eleven o'clock on the night of December 13. Captain Miguel Parra Entrena suddenly cried out as though he were awakening from a nightmare.

« Cursed be those who have starved me to death. May their children suffer the same fate. » He died the day after.

A week later on the 22nd when we heard the city beginning to celebrate the holidays with music and fire-

crackers Cristobal Entrena his younger brother also passed away. That makes two more « free men. »

January 1, 1920,

On the last night of the year we were suddenly informed that the « plane », as we called the means by which messages from the outside world reached us, would arrive shortly. Some of the prisoners had already received candy and different kind of good things for the holidays. Our pleasures are as simple as those of school-boys and a bun, three almonds and a little coffee makes us rejoice.

But now we were all excited over the arrival of the « plane. » A daring soldier, who is in the secret catches the match-box, which he attaches to a stone when Nereo happens to be looking the other way and tosses to a prisoner standing quite by accident (?) in the court-yard and apparently interested in the stars. The prisoner tosses back a little box wrapped in rags and the other prisoners take their places at strategic points where they can catch the plane as it goes by. They do so with that sureness of gesture and air of indifference which one only acquires after long months behind the bars. If the officer on duty or some other soldier should discover what was going on our accomplice would be shot at once. Yet the mail has been passing in by this precarious channel for several years under the very nose of our gaoler.

Nereo has decided to play the harp. Manuel Jose is playing the *maracas* and stands between « the cur » and the court-yard. We take advantage of this to pass the message along and the delivery is made in fast time. Only a few minutes elapse before the little paper reaches me through the wall and I press it to my heart. The tidings it contains are most

consoling .All is well, the only deaths in our family are some distant relatives and my dear ones are all in good health. I cannot prevent myself from shedding tears of joy. For the last eleven months I have been suffering all the anguish, the torture of uncertainty, have been the prey of a thousand hideous fancies.

Now, with my eyes fixed on the cross at the back of my cell, I whisper a prayer of thanksgiving to Him who created pigeons that die of love and Gomez' who poison the world with their venom.

I feel that I must do something reckless to express my joy. While Nereo is busy with his harp and Manule Jose accompanies him, jumping up and down in time to the music and holding the maraca in his hand, I lift a side of my curtain and slip hurriedly down the gallery to cell 44 where I am able to embrace Torres Abandero, Siso, Plaza, Ribes. It is impossible to do the same on the right for Nereo's eyes are turned in that direction.

Down below Delgado-Chalbaud, Leon and the others are playing dominos on a box. When they catch sight of me they spring up, alarmed, and make signs.

« Don't do that. You'll get into trouble. Go back. »

Like a flash I slip in through my curtain again. To have done this foolish prank after so many days of inertia, of submission, pleases me intensely. It was the exteriorisation of a violent inner satisfaction. One of those last acts of youth which become ever rarer as age steals over us.

At midnight we hear the cannon firing a salute. I count twenty-one reports. It's New Year's Day.

I recall some of the New Year's days I have spent elsewhere. Once I was lost on the pampas of the Guarico, alone in the wilderness under the glow of the

Southern stars. Once I was at sea in a fierce storm when the water seemed black as ink and the wind stung your face like a handfull of thistles. On several occasions I was in the dungeons of Puerto-Cabello or in the underground cells at San Carlos. This time I am at La Rotonde. Where will I be next year ?

## CHAPTER XXIX

A year's inventory. — Those white drops. — Neighbors and spies. — Carnival time ! — „The harp that once... ”. — Consoler of misfortunes. — New recruits and old veterans. — Regarding feminism. — The death of Dominguez Acosta. — How the devil pays.

Siano trenta d'una sorte  
e trentuno con la morte.  
Eia, l'ultima, Alala. »

*January-March 1920.*

The total of deaths for the twelve months which have just elapsed is as follows. Three victims among the seniors, Rendon, Mejias, Caricote, Among the juniors, that is to say among those imprisoned as a result of the «barracks plot», were eight victims. Felix Andrade Mora who died at the barracks of San Carlos or La Trinidad while being tortured, Domingo Mujica, Aranguren-Moreno, Ramirez R., Anibal Molina, Jose Augustin Badaracco, and the two Parra Entrena brothers. The six latter expired as a result of strange attacks of diarrhoea accompanied by symptoms of meningitis, convulsions and nausea. The intervals between their deaths was as follows : Thirty days between Aranguren Moreno and Ramirez R., twenty

days between the latter and Molina, eleven days between Molina and Badaracco, thirty-seven days between Badaracco and Miguel Parra Entrena, eight days between the latter and his brother Cristobal.

They were all robust young men between sixteen and thirty years of age. The little white drops certainly do their work well.

*January 6, 1920.*

General Roberto Gonzales, the aide de-camp of Antonio Ramos was brought to the Rotonde about the same time I was. He occupied cell n° 26 across the court-yard. During the first nights of our captivity I frequently heard his firm, calm voice replying to the questions Medina was in the habit of asking during his midnight examinations. Gonzales refused to give any information and replied categorically to the insidious insinuations of the rascally cripple. Not being able to obtain any information from this lion-hearted officer they employed a ruse which I only mention as a matter of historical information. They placed another prisoner, Augustos Mejias, in Gonzales' cell with orders to obtain by hook or crook some incriminating statement. The poor stool-pigeon, who had been starved or terrorised into accepting this role, failed in his mission. The only result was that he caught the consumption with which this cell was infected, and the authorities were obliged to transfer him to the court-yard. He paid for his attempted crime with his life. But Roberto Gonzales also caught the fatal germs and today, Epiphany, he lies dying in cell 47 where he was placed when he became seriously ill. His companion now is General Eduardo Sanchez, the only prisoner who is not in irons, the reason being that Medina is indebted to him for some

favor or other in the past. Sanchez is good and pious, he has nursed the sick man patiently and with real tenderness. Kneeling beside the plank on which the unhappy Gonzales lies gasping for breath, with his long white hair and silver beard framing his bronzed face Sanchez looks like a saint as he says his prayers for the soul of the dying man, telling them off on a rosary which he has made out of grains of corn strung together.

Gonzales was a long while a-dying. But at half past three or four in the afternoon it was all over. Another human bundle goes out through the grating. As he washes his feet in the pool in the court from which we obtain our drinking water Nereo comments on the incident to the orderlies.

« That makes twelve for this year. For, although we are now 1920, we can include him under the head of « work begun previously ».

Under the new arrangements Major Aponte and Captain Pimentel are attached to the same *grillo* in cell 73. In 38 Perucho Betancourt and Arturo Lara each have their separate pair. Beyond 37 are three uncurtained cells, black tombs from which the dead have been removed and which remain unoccupied. Nereo as he makes his morning rounds stops in front of them as he does in front of all the others and repeats, ironically his question, that takes on in this instance a sinister significance.

« Have you slept well ? »

Further along are cavalry Captain Carlos Mendoza and infantry Captain Argimiro Arellano, attached to the same bar. Beyond them, in individual chains, are Ricardo Corredor and Manuel Andrade Mora, the poor boy who had a position in the postal department of the custom-house at La Guaira and who was sent to prison simply because he happened to be the

brother of Felix Andrade Mora whom they have just murdered.

*February 1920.*

Our worthy gaoler, Nereo, seems uneasy. He spends long hours sitting on a stool under the stairs making believe he is taking a nap. Manuel Jose performs his daily tasks for him. The harp lies abandoned in a corner.

This worried air dates back several months to the day when he was taken into court in connection with his trial for murdering his mistress. On that occasion Nereo put on his Sunday suit, composed of garments which he had bought or « inherited » from the prisoners who have since died.

While Nereo was away and Manuel Jose has taken his place for a few hours we had a chance to look at one another and see what changes had occurred in our faces and clothes since we entered this hell-hole. Our features resembled those you see in a nightmare, our garments were tattered objects which a rag picker would have scorned. The prisoners who are on the lower tier came out to the middle of the court-yard for a chance to see us. They smiled pityingly at what they saw. Compared with us they seemed like princes, for they wore caps and had trousers that buttoned down the side in order to accommodate the *grillos*. Fortunately there is a special trick about slipping your trousers on and off which I learned at San Carlos. We are jealous of them also on account of their camp-stools, their little benches, their books, their slates, the water they have within reach and their sanitary arrangements, if one can give such a pompous name to such a filthy cesspool. Nestor Perez walks gingerly about as though his *grillos* were made

of glass and he were afraid of breaking them. Roman and Miguel Delgado-Chalbaud have arranged theirs so that they rest on a little wagon and allow the prisoners to move more easily. Carlos Leon, always fussy about his appearance, looks like a foppish dandy in a costume drama with his close-fitting trousers and his stockings tightly pulled up between the ring of his chains and his suede shoes. This varied raiment and the uncouth appearance of some of the other prisoners make them resemble a troop of actors waiting back-stage for their cue to go on.

On the other hand doubtless our own appearance when seen from below was even more fantastic. Iturbe has his face swollen and his grey beard and hair matted and unclipped. Torres Abandero is covered with sores. Luciani, Robinson, and Feo Calcano look like beggar knights, while Rocha might pass as a defrocked priest without parish. Figueroa's looks remind one of a combination of a jumping jack and a fish, while the officers on the left, at least those who have the courage to show themselves at all, have faces marked with deep lines of suffering and misery. Across the court-yard from me Acuna has parti-colored side whiskers. Ruiz is tonsured like a friar, Feo looks like a cow-herd. Vicente Rey is appallingly dirty because he has been lying on the brick floor and is so covered with red dust that he resembles a gold fish. Francisco Pimentel who has decided never to stand up in order to save his strength wriggles like a worm at the entrance of his cell. One man, Rodriguez, has a terribly inflamed mouth, another man's eyes seem to be starting out of his head. Juliac when he stuck out his bald pate received an ovation. Chaumerv's face is swollen and he has a flowing blond beard. Salvador de la Plaza's face is so pale and his hair is so red that if one rubbed his head against the wall it

would burst in flames just like a match. What a wonderful collection of caricatures we make ! Or what a success we would have at fancy dress ball. I am like the rest and my face, as I catch sight of it in my water basin, reminds me, on account of the madras handkerchief I have wrapped round my forehead, of an old engraving of Abbe Faria <sup>1</sup>.

Laughter and conversation becomes more and more animated, till after a while Huizi warns us.

« We had better be careful and get back into our cells for Nereo will be back pretty soon and if he has been sentenced to fifteen yeards hard-labor he will probably not be particularly good-natured about things in general. »

The prediction proved true. Af five o'clock the warder returned and began to take off his clothes and throw them about as soon as he had passed through the grating. He did not say a word to anybody. After making his rounds with Porras he came up to the higher tier and strode back and forth through the corridor, circling around like a vulture does when looking for its prey.

He was talking to himself and we managed every now and then to catch a word here and there. He was cursing everybody. Finally he stopped outside of Gonfalon's curtain, at cell 42, right next to me. The prisoner confined there tried to console him, to cheer him up. Gonfalon kept on insisting that Nereo had been unfairly treated and that if he (Gonfalon) were only free he would see to it that his friend Dr. Marquez Bustillos did something for the gaoler. Nereo listened for a few moments and told Gonfalon some of his hopes and fears. But when the generous prisoner tried

(1) One of the characters of Dumas' « The Count of Monte Christo **i.** »

to encourage the warden and told him « don't be down hearted, perhaps after all they will let you off because we all know how fond General Medina is of you », the gaoler's mood suddenly changed and he said harshly.

« That will do. Get back on your plank, you old parrot, you talk too much. »

With a timid rattle of his chains Gonfalon obeyed orders thoroughly upset about this savage, who first sought sympathy and then abused the man who offered it.

When several days passed and Nereo found that he was not being taken off to the Citadel he regained confidence. Now he has convinced himself that he will be left here as long as he knows how to « make himself useful ». The result is that he treats us worse than ever, feeling that that is the surest means of remaining in favor. Moreover he has had don Vicente's promise, which I mentioned a short time ago. Content to see prisoners die from time to time, he mocks at and reviles those who are sick.

After the famous day when Nereo had been condemned, in other words about the middle of 1919, three or four of the prisoners were released. But their places were quickly filled. The newcomers included Plaza, Ribas and Leo. Consequently it was easy to guess that that was the « class » they were anxious to do away with. Other prisoners were on the contrary freed from time to time. Among them Vicente Rey, who was wretchedly ill, was allowed to go so out in order that he could attend his daughter's funeral. He looked so much like a corpse himself that the authorities did not think it worth while to reimprison him. Previously Justo Arcia, Ponte Urbaneja, Don Pancho Rivero Saldivia and Serrano the engineer, had already been liberated. The other night they took

Dr. Francisco Paula Reyes out of his cell probably so that he could at least weep beside the bier of one of his dear ones. Dr Rafael Ricardo Revenga went out at the same time. The liberation of Dr Francisco was due to the intervention of Gomez' sister Dona Indalecia, the wife of general Martinez Mendez; while we heard later that his companion was given his freedom because Vicentico has just married a cousin of his.

Revenga's liberation and the fact that he now had become a relative by marriage of the reigning dynasty worried Nereo. He had ill treated this prisoner so violently that now he was obviously afraid of retaliatory measures. This was all the more understandable as it was on account of what he had done to the lawyer Angel Vicente Rivero, who had been in La Rotonde at one time, that he now found himself in serious difficulties over the sentence which has been pending ever since he had been convicted of killing his mistress. What might not Rafael Ricardo do to him?

Consequently the « cur » was not very surprised at the sentence passed by the judge and insisted that the severity of the terms was due not to the beastliness of the crime itself but to the « pull » of Revenga.

Although every passing day seems to confirm Nereo's hope that he will be left where he is, nevertheless the warden continues to threaten Dr Rivero. We tremble at the thought of what Nereo would do him if he ever had that man at his mercy.

In spite of the dozen recent deaths and the number of others which are likely to take place shortly, thus starting off the record for the year well, the prospect of being packed off himself to the convict camp at

(1) A remarkably clever lawyer. Has been living in New York for years as an exile.

Puerto Cabello seemed to have made Nereo a little more considerate of our feelings. Perhaps too the remarks of Iturbe and his own worries have made him a little less strict about enforcing the rules of the establishment.

Then too the « plane » or air-mail is arriving regularly, almost every week in fact. It brings us encouraging news from outside. We hear for instance that all the prisoners are to be released shortly, so the American minister has told the niece of a cousin of one of the prisoners who is here in the court-yard, the latter does not want his name mentioned but « is a very well informed person » so Figueroa assures us. Mr. Wilson has written to another person also in touch with authentic information that one of the first matters he will attend to is the fate of the political prisoners in Venezuela but that he cannot do anything till Clemenceau has recovered from the effects of the attack a lunatic made on him recently. Perhaps even before that the King of Spain will have written Gomez to let off « six selected prisoners ». Selected possibly like bulls are for a bull-fight. Nevertheless I cannot manage to figure out the connection that exists between all these rumours.

March 1.

I have passed on to my neighbors the last chapter of volume one of my latest book « Juan de Abilao or the Fire on the Ranch ». It is one of the things I have written with which I am the most satisfied but I don't dare think of the task it will be to reread and make a final draft of these hardly legible noted.

For the last two weeks I have been kept strictly to the prison fare, the *rancho* as it is called. Before that I was able to lift my seventy-five pound *grillo* up on

the plank. Now in order to get up or down I have to take the bar in my hands. My legs begin to be so thin and weak that I can hardly stand on them.

Miguel Delgado's little bitch spends the night chasing rats with the orderlies. The rats are enormous. They scream when the dog catchs them in a way that makes your blood run cold. In the morning we see them lying with their entrails exposed and their long mustaches covered with black, dried blood on the very spot where our meals are prepared and ladled out.

*March 1920.*

Dominguez Acosta cannot leave his cell to sit in the sunshine beside the stunted trees that grow in the court-yard. As he feels frightfully cold he took one of the curtains that hang over his doorway as a make-shift blanket. Nereo insisted that he put it back.

« Those are intended for curtains not for blankets. »

The gentle voice of the theosophist replied. « Thank you Nereo. »

I have a book which Acosta lent me secretly. It is a novel in English by Dolf Willard called « The Pathway of the Pioneer ». I was thinking about translating it when suddenly Carias came and interrupted me.

« Dr Dominguez Acosta has sent me to say that he is very ill indeed. He is passing on your papers to Arevalo Gonzalez who knows about them. He does not think he will live much longer. »

Sadly the messenger hung his head and added.

« He also said that you were to keep the book of his you have as a reminder.

« What do you mean, Carias ? Is he as low as that ? »

« Yes, he wishes me to say that the reason he has

not answered you himself is because his hands are shaking too hard and he is so dreadfully cold. »

I muse sadly over the fate of this exceptional man who possessed real literary ability and who is dying here in the cell just under mine simply because in a courageous article he had dared to declare that Venezuela should during the World War have fought on behalf of the cause that he considered represented that of Right.

I go back to my work but am again interrupted, this time by a groan whose meaning I know only too well and which scatters my ideas like chaff before the breeze. I lean out of my periscope and I notice that from the lower tiers all eyes are turned to a spot directly beneath my feet. Some of the prisoners have left their cells and are walking about, stopping when they come near the spot from which the moaning comes.

The moaning goes on gradually becoming fainter. At half past two it has become little more than a sigh. Shortly afterwards the grave, sad voice of Arevalo Gonzalez informs us.

« Doctor Dominguez Acosta has just died. »

No protest, no screaming, nothing. He passed on to join the celestial choir in a serene, dignified fashion. The clock of the cathedral which we sometimes hear strikes three.

Acosta slipped into the eternal night without vain recriminations, without superstitions alarms, without a prayer. He was like Leander plunging into the dark waters of the Hellespont to keep his tryst. He died enveloped in the silence and isolation characteristic of noble souls who are animated by that spirit to which Carlyle declares we should erect altars of universal adoration.

We are all of us greatly upset over Acosta's death

and our uneasiness seems to be shared by Nereo who bustles about in a veritable frenzy trying to hasten the final details of the transfer of the corpse from the prison to the hospital. The presence of this particular dead man seems to be more than he can stand.

At last this new victim is carried off. The same gruesome comedy takes place and a wretched doctor will issue the certificate showing that he died a « natural » death at the hospital. But his fate will not be that of some of the others. Unlike those who were forgotten and whose fate has remained unknown, people will hear of and remember the death of Dominguez Acosta. His name is inscribed on the roles of history. It was not poison that carried him off as it did the officers lodged on the upper tier, and the priests and Elisco, but he was foully murdered by hunger, by being deprived of fresh air, by being deliberately placed in a cell swarming with the germs of consumption.

« One less » highbrow « to worry about ». That is what they are probably saying at Maracay.

« One more victim to avenge », is what we answer. Ignorance is the most cruel affliction from which the mind can suffer. To be cruel is already to suffer the tortures of the damned. Gomez is cruel but his stupidity is even greater than his cruelty.

*End of March 1920.*

A few more days of silent grief slip by. How many of my companions have already crossed over to the Other Shore. Now many of us will shortly pay out our last fare to the spectral ferry-man ?

Nereo is in high spirits. Last night he played his harp till nearly nine o'clock while Manuel Jose accompanied him, capering about and making monkey like

faces. At ten o'clock a voice called out from the other side of the grating.

« Nereo. »

He hurried out joyfully, for he believed that a fresh lot of prisoners were arriving, that his duties would again become entetrtaining. As he left he said to us menacingly.

« Be careful, you fellows. Don't try and get gay. »

A long hour passed. Our rations were served out. At eleven o'clock Manuel Jose went to the grating to get news of what was happening. He came running back and dashed into the cell of Delgado-Chalbaud, which is the first on the left. Like an electric spark along two wires the news sped along the two tiers of cells.

« Nereo has been taken to the citadel. »

His harp, his belongings are being packed up so it must be true. The sunlight floods the court-yard. Arevalo Gonzalez after months of voluntary confinement in his cell struts about clanking his chains as proud as a turkey-cock.

Some try and dampen our enthusiasm.

« Don't be too hopeful. It is better to have something bad we know, than something new which may be worse. »

But such is the opinion of a small minority. The rest are unanimous in feeling that nothing worse than Nereo exists.

It really seems as though it were not Nereo who had left but life and hope that had come back, that blossom again in our tomb.

Later we heard the following details. Nereo entered the governor's office. He thought he had been sent for simply to receive the usual orders, such as « cut down So-and-so's rations », « put some white drops

into X...’s coffee », « don’t let the orderlies gossip among themselves ».

In the office he found neither Medina, nor Roa with his shark-like smile, nor even Porras and his suit made out of visiting cards. Several policemen seized hold of the warden and he was hustled along and pushed towards the door. Recovering from his surprise Nereo began to bellow like an ox :

« General Medina ! » « General Medina ! ».

The only reply he received were some punches from the policemen. Mad with rage at having been tricked and betrayed the prisoner turned and shouted.

« Curse you all. To treat me like this after I killed so many innocent men by your orders. »

And that is how the devil pays his servants.

## CHAPTER XXX

The latest enigma. — Bambuscós and Joropos. — The story of a bath and a cigarette. — Reading and writing. — The Sacred Comedy of Guerrero. — The death of Torres Abandero. — Some obituary notes. — Rumors regarding the Governor. — The death of General Pablo Giusepi Monagas. — The tragedy of July 5. — Dyptheria, typhus and consumption rival arsenic. — Disdainful death. — A half dozen demises and a few books. — The warden Meza.

*April-September 1920*

In the afternoon Porras came in with a new warden. He was a very tall man, thin and dark with long feet and a limp. He passed close by row of our curtains and then went downstairs again, always accompanied by the little man in paper clothes who pointed out each cell to him and then took him down to be introduced to those on the lower tier. I tried to study his features from my periscope. He did not make a good impression on me. His features are harsh. He has a jewish nose and his very black hais is curly.

The little negro Manuel Jose has also been transferred to the court-yard.

Porras went out locking the door after him. The new warden, huge as a giant, seated himself like some great bird roosting on its perch in Nereo's chair close to the grating.

We exchanged our impression of him. One of the first things we learned was his name, Macedonio

Guerrero<sup>1</sup>. This quaint reminder of Alexander the Great is quite ludicrous. The physical defect of the great Macedonian was that he carried his head a little to one side, somewhat like the Apollo in the National Gallery. His generals imitated this, thinking that by doing so they might acquire some of his genius. But the warrior to whose care we had been confided had a different infirmity, namely his limp.

From down below we heard that he comes from the Andes from Tachira to be exact, and that he seemed like « rather a decent sort ».

The first few days he maintained an aloof and rather uncompromising attitude. I noticed, however, that he had certain attentions and kindly mannera toward the prisoners. Yesterday at seven o'clock we had a concert that drew us all close to our curtains in order not to miss a note. Guerrero was sitting on this side of the grating while on the other a prisoner named Ramon Canino, I think, played the mandolin which our warden accompanied on a kind of Colombian guitar. They played some of those melancholy melodies, the *bambucos*, which one hears floating upward mingled with the cries of the mule train in the passes of the Andes, and which swoon away on a long note, that is like a sob, in their effort to attain the inaccessible peaks. This is the type of native music that has real grandeur, full of grief, anguish, a real spiritual quality.

A whole civilization separates these songs of the hills, pure as the air in which they resound, from the lewd, aggressive Venezuelan *joropos* that Nereo used to play, with their brusque broken rythms alternating with the languid creole melodies, haunting but

(1) Macedonian Warrior.

unhealthy. The two musics are separated by a definite ethonological frontier.

The concert lasted till nearly nine o'clock. We applauded after each piece and this applause is the only way in which we can express our appreciation for the good that this music does to our tormented and embittered souls.

How mistaken we often are in our first judgments. The man who has been set in authority over us is not a prison warder byt a dispenser of courage, a public benefactor. Day by day this humble son of the soil, this worthy fellow from Tachira is making us realize how much a kind hearted being can do, even though he is obliged to serve in a cave of wild beasts in the midst of a band of professional torturers and criminals.

Guerrero has become acquainted with the prisoners one by one. Downstairs he already knows all his charges and does them little favors. He slips in medecins, or consoling bits of news from outside. Although he cannot avoid taking part in the shameful profiteering of Medina in connection with our rations. on which the governor makes a handsome profit, he shows his reluctance, ventures an occasional protest, collects information as to what is going on and the result is that the food improves.

Secretly he passes on some of his own provisions to those who are the most destitute. He has promised to « lobby » to have the curtains removed on the upper tier. He comes when you call him and as far as possible gets you what you ask for. He lets us keep the curtains a little open during the day, thus airing our cells somewhat, and, supreme gift, he actually allows two or three at a time to have enough water to take a bath.

How childish it seems to write about it but how

unforgetable it was, the sensation of that first bath. How wonderful to really and truly have plenty of water and a big piece of soap after having been obliged to do without them for more than fifteen months. Carlos Leon, who is sometimes as delicate in his attentions as a woman, has offered us the loan of his Gillette, thus procuring us that supreme luxury for a prisoner — a shave. I scrape off my beard, I change my linen. The orderly sweeps out the cell. What does it matter if the floor does stay a little damp for a few hours. Little do I care as sitting on the plank, well washed, well shaved, I puff a cigarette and rejoice in my feeling of once more having regained my self-respect. In order to make things even more perfect, although it was against the rules to pass one another a book, the warden looks the other way while Roman Delgado-Chalbaud sends me concealed (?) in a tinned meat can from his cell the first volume of the complete works of Diderot. I turn the pages with feverish delight, the way one would unbutton the dress of one's beloved. The letters on the pages dance before my eyes like the elves in Shakespeare's « Midsummer Night's dream. » How dearly I love books. For the last year I have not been allowed to look at one. From now on I am in touch with a regular supply and I owe all this to Macedonio. I make a kind of mirror out of the top of a tin box which I adjust so that the light cannot be seen from outside after nine o'clock and I read every night till I fall asleep.

Iturbe also has books to lend me and we can once more indulge in the intellectual delights of exchanging our ideas about them. Sometimes the discussion spreads. Luiani is preparing a historical essay which he promises to read us some afternoon. But he will not do so till after Holy Week during which Father Mendoza intends to preach a series of sermons.

It was Carlos Leon who suggested the idea of giving lectures by delivering a course on sociology and political economy two afternoons a week. After Porras has made his round Leon settles himself in the middle of the court-yard with his books and notes surrounded by the other prisoners confined downstairs. We, on the upper tier, listen silently behind our curtains. Later each one prepares a composition on a given subject and reads it aloud. Some of these essays are most interesting. Discussions arise. These talks and exchange of views enable us to regain a foot-hold in the intellectual world from which we had been cut off by our tyrants. For all this we are indebted to an uneducated man who is merely kind, good-hearted, who devotes all his intelligence, all his natural gifts for dissimulation, to the task of doing good, of making Medina believe that we are as wretched and as ill treated as we were in the days of Nereo. All the time he knows perfectly well that some of us have loosened the screws in our *grillos*, take them off at night and walk about without them in our cells in order to help the circulation in our legs. Indeed we actually go visiting, slipping swiftly and silently as shadows from one curtain to another.

But, alas, before he was able to enjoy all this, another of our comrades passed away. Torres Abandero died covered with sores and unable to move from his plank. He began to feel the end coming on one day just as twilight was falling. Torn by spasms of pain and convulsions he kept muttering resolutely, as though defying fate to do its worst, « But I am not dead yet ».

In one of these spasms Abandero fell from the plank to the floor, pulling his chains down on top of him. The *grillos* made a loud noise. He moaned a few times

and kept on muttering the same phrase « I am not dead yet » as though it were a magic spell. The warden came, accompanied by the orderlies. They lifted him up and put him back on the plank, bandaged his forehead which he had injured in his fall and watched by his side as he breathed his last, moaning and shrieking in his death agonies always that same grotesquely tragic phrase « I am not dead yet ». Those were his last words when he past away between half past eleven and midnight.

Our fellow prisoners wished me to pronounce a short funeral oration the following day at the time when we usually held our classes, which were put off as a sign of mourning. I have never written a page which was so instinct with sincere grief. Alas poor poet who celebrated the grace of those « butterflies » which he saw flitting about the gardens of Caracas, in the days when Caracas was still a garden spot on earth, inhabited by brilliant men and beautiful women interested in intellectual matters, and not an armed camp thronged with mercenaries, adventurers and camp-followers.

What crime had Abandero committed that he should be so foully murdered ? For is it anything else than murder to leave a man for over a year with his body covered with sores, without medical attention, without the proper food, without even enough air to breath as he lies there in a prison cell ? Once more Gomez proved himself nothing but a criminal and a murderer when he did away with this kind, intelligent, inoffensive, hard working man who left behind him a widow and children reduced to poverty.

The crime of Abandero was as follows. He was the intimate friend of Pedro Manuel Ruiz and myself. This made Gomez suppose that he knew what we were planning. All some police spy had to do there-

fore was to act on this idea and it was enough to have our poor friend arrested, put in irons and martyred.

Thus the sole offense of Leopoldo Torres Abandero was to have been a gentle, kindly man at a period when violence and rapine formed the normal atmosphere of our country.

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One afternoon Macedonio Guerrero came to pay me a visit. He told me how, for insignificant reasons, three members of the Gomez family, Eustoquio, Evaristo and Simon had him kidnapped from an estate in Tachira where he was working ; how he had been tortured and hung head downwards for hours at a time ; how they had afterwards sent him to the prison for common law criminals. I do not know who recommended him to Medina. The latter trusted our new gaoler because he considered him a brave, uncompromising man, and appointed Guerrero warden in the political section. The governor is under the impression that the warden is cruel, brutal and harsh in his treatment of the prisoners.

Macedonio talks to me quite frankly. He tells me that he knows I am writing a book and that I can count on him, no matter what danger it involves, to smuggle out the manuscript and deliver it to anyone I tell him to on the outside.

As a matter of fact he has already turned over the first chapters to one of my trusted friends.

Medina told Guerrero the other day — and the warden repeated it to us — that when Gomez the elder was recently at Caracas and Medina went to see him to pay his respects, the « General » said.

« The insurgents can come and attack me if they want to. They can try and start something any time they want. I am ready for them. »

Medina added, « Tell the boys in there (we are the boys) that they must not count too much on the idea that I will ever let them get out alive, no matter what happens. »

Guerrero has reached an agreement with us that he will start a mutiny if there is ever any sign of carrying out this threat. He has friends in the other part of the prison and even some of the officers on guard duty are in relation with some of the prisoners. Speaking of the future the warden remarks in his slow, determined way.

« In any case I am, and I will be, on your side. We will die fighting. I won't let you be slaughtered like a flock of sheep. »

Thanks to the warden or to the orderlies on both tiers there is not a single prisoner who cannot slip off his *grillos* when he wants to. Some of us have already begun to manufacture weapons out of pan handles. But these may not be necessary, sixty resolute men swinging the bars of the *grillos* could drive their way through any opposing forces.

\* \* \*

On the morning of July 3, we heard from the court-yard, that General Pablo Giuseppi Monagas had just expired. He had managed to stand his first confinement very well. The second time he was brought here his interview with Iturbe and the latter's harsh remarks had wounded him. A man of honor who expected loyalty in others, he was deeply affected by what had taken place and the incident had probably hastened his end. He had counted on Marquez Bustillos. Although living conditions on the lower tiers are not as harsh as they are here this man, who was already in delicate health, could bear not them more than a year and a half.

\* \* \*

Lieutenant Julio G. Hernandez who is reported to be a spy, but this I refuse to believe, has just been taken from cell n<sup>o</sup> 27, where Mejias and Roberto Gonzales caught consumption and placed in another cell on my left, either n<sup>o</sup> 32 or 33. Macedonio has managed to find better quarters for those who formerly had to share their cell with another prisoner. Now Rocha has one to himself, and so has Piazza. But the change came too late for poor Lieutenant Hernandez. That terrible consumption of the throat which killed Gonzales had gripped him in its savage claws. He grows steadily weaker. On the other hand the last few days he seemed a little better and I caught a glimpse of him sitting on a little wooden box outside his cell door. He was paler than ever, more and more silent and kept looking at the court-yard, at the sunshine in the fountain, at the pigeons flitting about, with a most melancholy air.

\* \* \*

July 5, 1920.

The cannon sounded at six this morning and again at noon. But at three o'clock while I was doing my German lesson on a bit of slate I heard a horrible, blood curdling shriek, the cry of an animal that is being slaughtered. Putting our heads through the curtains we saw Hernandez rolling on the ground between cells 32 and 33, clutching at the bricks in the corridor as though he wanted to tear them up with his nails. He had ceased to be a human being and become a mere animal with its eyes starting out of its head, gasping and choking as it stretches wide its jaws in a frantic effort to snatch a swallow of air

into its lungs, while in a voice that began on a grating note and ended in a horrible, hoarse whisper he kept repeating, « I am dying, I am dying, I am dying. »

His hands opened and shut madly as though he were trying desperately to grasp and retain that life which he felt slipping from him. The face of the dying man will, I am sure, haunt me forever and I will always see before me his contorted features and hear his sobs and moans. « I am dying, I am dying. » As though turned to stone we stood transfixed, unable to remove our gaze from this heartrending spectacle which lasted some four or five minutes, minutes which seemed like hours of intense anguish.

« I am dy... »

The last syllable sticks in his throat, another spasm as his neck twists about. He opens his arms and falls face forward on the ground while his fingers, lean and yellow, gradually relax and lie there like claws cut from a dead bird.

\* \* \*

Manuel Olivares, the orderly who for some time has not been able to leave his cell and spent his days lying on the plank where Domingue Acosta perished, breathed his last this morning. He was among the prisoners from Guyana. Poor chap he was born in poverty and became one of the expiatory victims of that slaughter which began in the forests of the Orinoco and had its epilogue within these stone walls.

His companions Narciso, Carias, Mogollon, colonel Reyes Moncayo, colonel Americo Spinetti grow daily thinner and more silent as they gaze at the body of their comrade and asks themselves the tragic question, « When will it be my turn ? »

Yet things are much better than they were. The new warden does everything that is in his power to

ease our lot and avert these tragedies but they are the result of « work already begun » as Nereo would say. I cannot tell how any of us have managed to survive up till now. About the middle of last year Roman Delgado was taken ill with a kind of diphtheria and could not obtain any remedy for it. Porras Bello, with his fingers, was obliged to tear the false membranes out of his throat as though they were handkerchiefs in order to prevent his choking to death. Carlos Leon was taken ill with typhoid and only recovered on account of his strong constitution. All that Porras was able to get for him in the way of treatment was permission to be put in another cell.

We have all of us at times suffered from alarming illnesses. I began, like everybody else, by the usual attack of dysentery. How I managed to come through I cannot tell. The days of Nereo was a period of unspeakable horror.

\* \* \*

Macedonio having « compromised » himself several times has been removed from his post but given the general supervision of the two prisons, ours and that of the common law prisoners. We have as our direct head a man named Meza who is said to be the illegitimate son of General Eduardo Sanchez now confined in cell n° 47.

The new man is a mulatto from Maracaibo with slanting eyes and a wily, servile and deceitful nature. But Macedonio remains the head warden and frequently comes to see how we are getting on and listen to our complaints. Meza is satisfied to let things go on as they did under Macedonio but we are aware that he only acts this way because he feels that this is the conduct that will prove the most profitable.

One of the things Macdeonio Guerrero did before

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Meza was made warden here was to admit into the court-yard the little orphan boys and homeless lads whom the police of Caracas round up every so often and send to prison as though it were a reformatory, and in order that they may serve to amuse the common law prisoners who teach them all manner of degenerate practices.

Macedonio persuaded Medina to have these boys placed with the political prisoners to take the place of the orderlies who have died and at the same time to save them from the contaminatig influences of the other inclosure.

The first one who came to us was Felix Manzo a little twelve year old fellow, born in Caracas and now an orphan. He was a perfect type of little street arab. Manzo was warmly received. The prisoners took up a collection to get him some clothes. Miguel Delgado is teaching him to read and in the evening he sings to us in his fresh, boyish tenor, beating time on an empty tin box.

Some time afterwards another recruit joined our asylum, a little brown boy called Jesu Maria Toro, the son of a shoemaker. He was a light-fingered young rascal and quick as a flash in his gestures. Although only eight he was more wide awake than twelve year old Encarnacion Rodriguez who followed him. Pale and sad with eyes like those of some domestic animal that has strayed into a strange neighborhood, this child's beart is evidently yearning for some of that maternal affection which fate has denied him. His features have that melancholy expression of children who have never known what it is to have a mother. Since he has become friendly with me he every now and then darts into my cell and throw his arms round my neck making believe that he is merely playing a game. The last arrival was Pedro Arna, thirteen years

of age. Pedro is reserved in manner, rather sly, obstinate but on the whole a good little chap. Encarnacion has a sub-normal anemic intelligence. As I cannot make him do his lessons I try and find games for him to play which will teach him to think and count.

Jesus Maria Toro, the little black demon, has been adopted by General Delgado-Chalbaud whom he speaks of as « Papa ». The lonely general lavishes on this child the affection he could not bestow on his little ones during the years and years he has been separated from them. He has bought a complets new outfit for his protégé and spends days teaching him to read and how to behave. But the scamp steals his benefactor's cheese and anything else he can lay his hands on. The general takes him to Father Mendoza who talks about Saint Augustin and the good Samaritan. The picanniny expresses his remorse for past misdeeds but the next minute he is up to mischief again.

Neither Saint Augustin, nor the reproaches of Delgado-Chalbaud, nor the whippings of Don Avelino Uzcategui can change his nature. Iturbe and I laugh till we cry when General Delgado wrings his hands in despair and exclaims, « I don't know what in the world to do with this little black rascal. He is driving me mad, drinking up my water supply, gobbling up my cheese and keeping me awake worrying about him. »

Iturbe tells Encarnacion and the other children, as they sit in a ring outside his cell wonderful stories and enjoys them himself as much as do his listeners. This is the way that those terrible enemies of society, according to General Gomez, spend their time.

## CHAPTER XXXI

The Students. — Bolivar Hill and the Latin-American Committees. — The Murder of Americo Spinetti.

*October-December 1920*

One evening I recited the verses of Leoncio Martinez. The latter is the most swert natured poet of the younger generation. I have always admired both his kindly attitude towards most people, and the cruelly ironic and yet suave severity with which he snubs the cynics and those who are too full of their own importance. He has written a poignant, bitter song about the inevitability of exile which fills the hearts of us poor prisoners with sadness.

I keep on writing away in my cell without knowing whether these memoirs will see the light of day, before my eyes shall have closed for the last time. My anguish and pity are so great that they abolish all thought of anger or revolt. May God have pity on us all, the good, the bad, the irresponsible. At the very hour while we, in these iniquitous cells, are suffering for their sake our fellow countrymen are taking up arms to combat us, are writing against us, make fun of us, hate us and tear us apart simply because we appear to be men who prevent their obtaining more food, or stand in the way of their promotion, or disturb their peace of mind. Blinded by

what they had devoured, they proved themselves cowards or else accomplices of the crime that was being committed. At the very instant when they should have been coming to our rescue, they stifled the voice of their conscience, wrapping themselves up in a vague utopian dream which served as convenient disguise for the fear they felt gnawing at their vitals. As private individuals they would not have allowed and insulting remark to be passed without having resented it, punctilio where their family honor was involved they shut themselves up within the four walls of their private interests and became mere passive spectators of the most hainous crimes. Their only comment was, « It is none of my business. » They had posed as our brethren, as men who shared our hopes and ideals, they proved themselves time-serving courtiers ready to sell their talents or their good name to beings whom they at heart despised. They place their intelligence, their strength, their intellectual self-respect at the service of the crudest barbarians. In all too short a time they will receive the wages of their shame and the favorites of to-day will become the exiles, the prisoners, the victims of to-morrow.

Among our number at the present time we have Iturbe and Delgado-Chalbaud, Simon Bello and Avelino Uzcategui. One day the soul of these men awoke, their eyes were opened and they realized what was going on about them. They revolted — and here they are, condemned to bite their nails in despair and perhaps to die with their ambitions, their hopes unsatisfied. That is what the future holds in store for Galaviz, or Arcaya, for Vallenilla or Jurado. And if by chance they escape a dungeon it will be to tread the long, hard road of life-long exile. Look over the list of those who at one time enjoy-

ed the tyrant's favor. Having done so you will be able to judge once and for all the logic and continuity and loyalty of this rascally « caudillo ».

Wipe out the definitions of the word treachery in the dictionary and replace them by synonyms of everything that is fine and patriotic.

Betray one man in order to save three million,

Betray a robber in order to save the lives of thousands of his victims.

Betray a traitor in order that you may be forgiven, for your country's sake, the weakness, inertia which allowed fate, circumstances and the atmosphere of the period to blind you and befog your mind and heart.

Betray Gomez — because Gomez is treason incarnate.

\* \* \*

All sorts of rumors reach us and we feed on hope and illusions. It is said that an investigating committee of Yankees has arrived at Caracas for the purpose of looking into « what is going on there anyway ». Some of the prisoners are sure that their friends are acting on their behalf and that they will certainly be sent for shortly. Simon is all the time expecting to be sent for.

In the meanwhile we hear Prince Fernando de Bourbon has arrived from Spain. A group of ladies, the mothers, the wives, the daughters of the political prisoners form a committee which calls on the royal visitor to present their case. But the Prince declines to compromise himself. He had his secretary receive the committee. He is entertained, feted, there are balls and exchange of decorations, but we continue to wear our *grillos*.

Some time later the French cruiser *Jeanne d'Arc*

called at La Guaira and made a special trip to the bay of Turismo in order to have the honor of receiving on board Gomez, that intimate friend of the German minister von Prolius during the war, and offering him a glass of champagne.

The French colony at Caracas organized at the Alliance Française a special meeting in honor of Vicentico at which it was voted and recommended that he receive the Cross of the Legion of Honnor. The same distinction was likewise conferred on Carvallo and Pedro Garcia.

Meanwhile Dominguez Acosta has died in prison, the pro-French journalists who wrote in *El Avion* and *El Fonografo* are behind the bars, and all those who ever expressed pro-French opinions during the war have been reduced to silence in one way or another.

Surely at the French Foreign Office on the Quai d'Orsay the man who attends to the affairs of Latin America must be either a fool or a rascal.

## CHAPTER XXXII

Voices in the Wilderness. — « America's Disgrace » or « Between the hoof of the Pachyderm ». — Alea jacta est.

« Attention ! Attention ! »

We have been waked up at midnight. The courtyard buzzes with rumors. Everybody is on the alert. Warden Meza hurries to the grating. The orderlies silently move about from door to door.

« They are bringing in prisoners, many, many prisoners. »

It is true. In the half darkness I notice numerous groups passing through the grating. There must have been a riot, an indignation meeting, an insurrection.

« They are students. All of them are students. »

« Is that true ? »

« Yes. Something very serious must have happened. There are more than eighty of them and more keep coming all the time. »

As soon as it was light we heard the news.

A group of young men belonging to the different Schools, who with great difficulty had been keeping alive the traditions and ideals of the former Students Association, had asked permission to hold an indignation meeting to protest against the insufficient service furnished by the Electric Tram Company of Caracas. These and other complaints had been set forth in respectful and even timid phrase on a printed broadside which was distributed through-

out the city. This was done with the permission of the Prefect but when the public, as it would have done in any civilised country, took the side of the students and boycotted the tramways, the local director of the company, a foreigner, although, born in one of those free countries where strikes are allowed, where the liberties of the individual are respected and where a parliamentary form government is in force, complained about it to the « good and kind man » of Maracay.

The blow fell a few minutes later. The « rebels » were rounded up in short order. Now they have been parked here in the two court-yards of the Rotonde. They are between fourteen and twenty years of age, one of them is lame and has to walk on crutches, others are cripples. Many of the students belong to the best families in Caracas and in the provinces. They include a number of the sons of Gomez' intimate friends such as Taglia-Ferro, Numa P. Osuna and so on. There are eighty-two boys in all who are left out of doors, exposed to all sorts of weather, in the court-yard that separates the old and the new Rotonde.

The new arrivals send us a round-robin of greeting and encouragement. The prisoners whose cells face the grating —and I am one of these — show themselves so that the students may catch a glimpse of us as they pass. They go by looking at us with sidelong glances. Some of the more daring raise their hand cautiously and make a hurried salute.

Medina takes advantage of this opportunity to sell them meat at two and a half bolivars <sup>2</sup> a pound.

We are really proud to see these students in our midst even though it is only on account of a row over the tramways.

For two or three days indignation at the way in

which the rebels are being treated continues. I admire the spirit of self-sacrifice, of generosity and simple affection which the Venezuelans hide in the hearts, as shamefacedly and obscurely as though it were some precious jewel they had stolen. The prisoners here, one and all, forget their own troubles and think only of those of the newcomers. Yet after all they are not so badly off, they wear no *grillos*, they are allowed to walk about, to eat what they can pay for. They adopt the pose of heroic victims, of Girondins, writing on the walls epigrams, dates and quotations from their favorite authors side by side with references to the bitterness of captivity and the rigors of the law. In these inscriptions one finds the initials of their sweetheart, who I am sure is at the present moment in a state of boundless admiration for her lion-hearted hero, an admiration which has some of that aggressive gentleness that women feel when their companions courageously resist the blows of an unkind and unjust fate,

How proud these girls must be to say ; « My fiancé is in prison. »

This Sunday after mass at San Francisco these fortunate heroines of a novel that is actually real will hold their heads higher, walk with an air of conscious superiority and feel their heart beating faster. Youth is like that.

April 1.

The last « air-mail » has brought us news that arouses our enthusiasm.

This is what has happened. On April 19 there was inaugurated in Central Park, New York city and on Bolivar Hill here, a monument of the Great Liberator, gifts from the people of Venezuela to the com-

patriots of George Washington, as expression of their affection and admiration for the American Government. On this occasion Warren Harding, the newly elected President of the United States read a speech which was at the same time a statement of his attitude and his program in regard to the relations between the great Northern Republic and her Southern sisters.

Naturally the Venezuelan Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr E. Gil Borges was present at this solemn ceremony, having been sent there on a special mission. He was accompanied by the Venezuelan Minister Dominci who had been recognized by the American Chancellerie. The day which marked the glorification of the memory of the champion of our independence, on the soil of an independent country where the flag that had floated triumphantly at Bunker Hill and Saratoga waved beside that which floated from the rocks of the Caribbean to Desaguadero<sup>1</sup>, in a glorious gesture of freedom won in the face of desperate odds, was indeed a memorable one. No wonder therefore that at such a time the spectators responded with an emotion worthy of the occasion.

Not allowing themselves to be hypnotized by the fireworks, the set speeches, the bands, the Committees of Latin America turned their thoughts to Venezuela and recalled the mournful plight of that unhappy land. They remember what she, the eldest daughter of Liberty in the Southern continent, is enduring in the way of suffering and misery. They recall her gaols crammed with political prisoners the thousands of her citizens in exile, persecuted on foreign soil, the crimes that have been committed

(1) A phrase meaning from Venezuela to Peru.

there against the liberty of the individual, the most elementary justice. They remember too the rumors they have heard regarding what goes on in her prisons, how men are tortured there, in a way the very thought of which makes the blood run cold, in order that the unfortunate victims may confess deeds they never committed or denounce their brothers and friends. Although they are ignorant of the greater part of these crimes, or know them only in a comparatively innocuous form, the members of these committees, not acting from any political motives or seeking any ulterior object, but merely prompted by a spirit of compassion, drew up a resolution addressed to Juan Vicente Gomez, duly elected by the national Congress President in name and dictator for thirteen years in fact, calling on him to free those political prisoners, the unhappy children of that great hero, that champion of Freedom of whom Minister Gil Borges said in his speech that « his only weakness was his thirst for glory ». The following wireless signed by the representatives of all the Republics was despatched to Gomez. « To the President of the Republic of Venezuela, Maracay, Venezuela. The undersigned Presidents of the Committees of Latin-America, gathered together at this solemn moment, in the presence of President Harding, Secretary Hughes, Minister Dr Gil Borges, Dr Dominici, Governor Miller, Mayor Hylan, the Diplomatic Corps of all the countries of South America and more than five hundred other prominent persons of all nationalities at the statue of the Liberator Simon Bolivar offered by Venezuela to the city of New-York express the following wish. That this memorable occasion be fittingly celebrated by the release of the political prisoners now in captivity in the land of the great Liberator, and we request that you take

the necessary steps to fulfill our desire. Signed : « *Argentine*, Rodolofo Garcia Arias ; *Brazil*, Julio Costa Pereira, captain Sylvino Freire ; *Bolivia*, R. Martinez Vargas, Jorge de la Reza ; *Chili*, Severo Salcedo, Erelesto Guzman, Charles Henry Lee ; *Colombia*, M. Guitterez, G.-A. Diaz Guerra ; *Costa Rica*, V. Fonseca, V.-E. Artavia ; *Cuba*, A.-P. Barranco ; *Ecuador*, Carlos F. Hernandez, J. Cueva Garcia, Ernesto Stagg ; *Guatemala*, C. Irigoyen, M. Soto Hall, V. Rodriguez Beteta ; *Honduras*, M. A. Herradora ; *Mexico*, Esquivel Obregon ; *Nicaragua*, Dr J. Medina, Anabel Zelaya, Alceo Haezera ; *Peru*, E. Cenarro ; *Panama*, Manuel de Obaldia ; *Paraguay*, Dr Cayetano Maxsi. *Salvador*, V.-C. Escalante, Ruben Rivera ; *Dominican Republic*, Octavio Elias Moscoso, Manuel Ayala, F.-H. Rivero, R.-E. Lopez. »

Gomez, who at that time was at San Juan de les Morros taking baths for his liver complaints, has not answered as yet.

It is said that the speech of Gil Borges in which he did not mention the name of Gomez, probably out of a last remnant of self-respect and esteem for the country where he was, for the persons who were listening to him and for the memory of the Liberator will result in his political downfall. These are the drawbacks to the career of supporter of an Administration such as ours.

\* \* \*

Americo Spinetti is dying after a long martyrdom which has lasted seven years. He managed to survive the dreadful days under Duarte Cacique, Cacimbo and Nereo. His case is hopeless. Consumption has done its work. He cannot walk even if his *grillos* are taken off. His hardly audible voice may

sometimes be heard echoing feebly from the depths of his cell. The feebleness of the voice and the vigor of the ideas it expresses form a striking and pitiful contrast. But now his mind is going.

For some time past Spinetti has had an obsession for medicinal drugs. He would ask me if I knew any of the remedies used by the natives and I used to make up some fantastic prescriptions simply to amuse myself. I was surprised and alarmed when the orderly told me that Spinetti has not only copied them down in his book but had even tried several of them.

For the last week Spinetti has been living in the cell where Dominguez Acosta passed away. Last night Porras Bello « telegraphed » me « He will not survive another twenty-four hours. »

Americo Spinetti was imprisoned at Ciudad Bolivar along with Juan Cabrera the first Governor of the prison, Rafael Recao <sup>2</sup>, Juan Manuel Sucre <sup>2</sup> and a number of perfectly innocent people. These arrests were carried out by General Gimón Perez about March 20 1914. The men whose names I have mentioned were later released.

Spinetti and his fellow prisoners were taken to Caracas in the hold of a war-ship. They were in irons at the time and Reyes Moncayo <sup>2</sup> had been wounded.

From La Guaira they were marched on foot to Caracas, the wounded man being tied to the back of a donkey. All of these poor wretches were pilloried for the public to look at on the Place Bolivar and afterwards taken to La Rotonde.

Mme Maria Hernandez Spinetti went to Maracay in June 1918 to ask Gomez to release her husband. She managed to obtain an interview with the General and implored him on her knees to free Americo

She pled with him in the name of his mother, of his children. Gomez listened to her, standing with his legs apart and his hands slipped into the top of his great boots. His only reply was that he would have to ask the opinion of Simon who had sent them to prison. Years went by.

One of Americo's brothers heard that the prisoner was very ill and wrote the Governor of the Federal District asking that the sick man be sent to a hospital for treatment. His letter was never acknowledged.

The callousness of these people is something both amazing and abominable. As an example I might quote an incident that took place at the death bed of Gomez' mother. This old peasant woman was very religious and feeling that she was about to die she sent for Juan Vicente to ask him to free the two priests, Mendoza and Monteverde. It was perhaps the priest who had given her the last rites of the Church who had suggested the idea, but, at any rate, the old woman was afraid to die as long as her son kept the priests in prison.

« My son », she said, « this is the last request I will ever make to you. Release the priests. »

Gomez, his eyes filled with tears, kissed her hands and answered,

« Yes, my little mother, yes I will release them at once. You may be sure I will do this for you. »

The old woman died, And when one of his sisters reminded Gomez of his promise, he answered frankly,

« Why no, I can't let them out, but at any rate Mother died thinking I was going to and that was a comfort for her. » What do you think of that ?

His mother's body was taken from Macuto to Caracas. As the vehicle on which the coffin had

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been placed made a terrible dust Gomez, who was right behind, ordered his chauffeur to go in front. The hearse followed and the rest trailed along in the back.

This last detail seems to me doubtful. But perhaps it was not really on account of the dust. I have mentioned that there is a superstition in this country that it brings bad luck to walk back of a corpse. Nereo for instance avoided doing so on all occasions.

April 7, 1921.

This morning Colonel Americo Spinetti died at half past five. Thirteen years ago he had been Gomez' brother-in arms and with him took part in the attack of the Maison Jaune <sup>1</sup>.

Spinetti was more ill-treated than any other prisoner. This was due partly to his character, but also for some reason or another the wardens were particularly hard on him. He received neither money nor clothes from outside, although certainly his relatives sent him supplies. He died literally from exposure and misery. I have just been asked if I could furnish some garment to dress him in. His body will be turned over to his family at the Hospital Varga and they will be told he died there. That is what is always done.

The corpse has passed through the grating. A little creoline has been scattered on the soil. For the two or three hours the prison has been very still, with a stillness in which one seems to hear the whispered prayers being said for the dead man's soul and muttered curses against the tyrant. A stillness

(1) The governmental residence at Caracas.

that is like the stillness of a court-room or the stillness of God.

For two days afterwards the place smelt so that they were obliged to burn eucaliptus leaves. Several times more creoline was poured on the floor of the cell where Americo had expired. But still the stink of corruption hovered in the air, polluting our nostrils.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

A poem of renunciation. — The inevitable traitor makes his appearance. — Official visits.

*April-December 1921.*

The Committees representing Latin America refuse to be discouraged. They have just sent another letter to Caracas, a copy of which has reached us. This is what it says :

The moral unity of America is at stake. The Committees representing Latin America and assembled in New-York repeat their request that the political prisoners of Venezuela be released at once. Their President, Dr Herradera, on August 31, 1921 issued a statement refuting the claims made by Dr V. Marquez Bustillos, President pro tem of Venezuela. The statement of Dr Herradera is as follows : M. President I beg to acknowledge your letter of July 5<sup>th</sup> 1921 which replied to the one I sent you on behalf of the Committees of Latin America. In my message I reiterated the wireless sent you by this body on April 19 and which was addressed to the President of Venezuela, our sister nation, which has up till now been so admirably represented in our midst by Dr Esteban Gil Borges and Dr Dominici. This message was sent you during the celebration held in honor of the Liberator, Simon Bolivar, the importance of which was increa-

sed by the presence of his Excellency Warren Harding, President of the United States who on that occasion made an eloquent speech, full of respect for our liberties and of promises for the future. The praised the great son of Venezuela in such apt words that they revealed both the gifts of M. Harding personally as a statesman and generous nature of the great republic so rich in lessons of altruism and disinterestedness. The Committees can only regret the confusion which, so you inform us M. President, arose in your mind and in that of General Gomez as to the person to whom this wireless was addressed, whether it was to the President who had been elected, but had not yet taken office or, to you who were provisionally head of the Administration. This doubt to be sure is quite natural since Venezuela is the only nation having two presidents as you, Dr Marquez Bustillos, pointed out in your addresses and messages to Congress in which you announced that the acts of the Venezuelan government were solely inspired by Juan Vicente Gomez and his enlightened policies, which were exercised as those of the supreme head of the state through you, for the benefit of the country as a whole. Not having received any reply to our radio we felt it necessary to confirm it in order to avoid the possibility of any misunderstanding. This was done, the second missive being addressed to you personally with the indication of your official position. To this you replied refusing to free the political prisoners and attempting, M. President, to justify their indefinite captivity in unhealthy dungeons on the grounds of public safety. Moreover you also accused the Committees of having drawn up their petition under the influence of political opponents of your administration, as though common humanity were not sufficient to inspire our action.

The statement you make, M. President, in the third paragraph of your reply is to say the least entirely gratuitous and without any basis in fact. You state « I can see that the suggestion you make for granting a wide amnesty was not prompted as much by a sentiment of pity, as by the suggestions of those who criticise the present regime in this country ». Why do you attempt to deny the spontaneity of our emotion which burst forth at the moment when the immortal Simon Bolivar was being eulogised.

On the same grounds that prompt you to doubt the disinterestedness of our action we, the members of these Committees, could far more justly charge the Government of Venezuela with not having erected and inaugurated the statue of the Liberator out of patriotic devotion to his memory, but as a part of the strategy of a political manœuvre and in the hope of obtaining from the Government in Washington certain favors, while seeking at the same time to cover, by the sounds of national anthems, the dismal clanking of chains, the moans of captives and mournful tolling of bells ringing the farewell of those who are being condemned to a living death by their fellow countrymen merely because they have different political ideas.

What is there new or surprising in what we have done or sought to do ? Does not history contain the records of many similar actions. And is it not on such occasions as the one we took advantage of that governments are in the habit of decreeing far-reaching amnesties, thanks to which they are later able to affect the reconciliation of opposing parties ? Unless we misread the records of history, M. President, have not Presidents of Venezuela up to now frequently been in the habit of signing such decrees. Has not the President of Honduras in reply to the

suggestion made by our Committees signed quite recently such a law?

We must add that we have read in the newspapers of this country long and detailed articles which have never been denied by the press or Consuls of Venezuela — who, had they been able to do so, would naturally, for the sake of national honor seek to refute any charges which expose their country to the reprobation of public opinion everywhere. These articles accused in the most direct and serious manner the present administration of exercising its authority in a most tyrannic fashion and being especially cruel towards political prisoners. They even stated that the latter were left in their dungeons up to the very last moment and only transferred to the hospital when they were at death's door, this having occurred recently, for instance, in the case of M. Americo Spinetti who had been denied medical attendance, in spite of the demands of his family, after he had suffered long years of confinement without any form of legal trial.

We have talked, M. President, with entirely impartial persons, foreigners as well as Venezuelans, among them many friends of your government, and they have either openly confirmed or hinted at the truth of what we have just said regarding the method employed by your administration. Moreover we have in our possession the actual photographs published in the New-York Times together with detailed correspondence of political prisoners confirming the inquisitorial methods of the Venezuelan government which are in direct opposition to civilized laws and customs and are an insult to the nation which by its culture and historic past is entitled to the enforcement, the respect and the maintenance of its traditions for free government on the part of the cons-

titutional bodies. Will the President pro tem accuse us of undue frankness in calling on truth to ratify our statements ? We will furnish proofs that we seek only to further the ends of abstract Right and Justice.

We have also read in the press the messages of the President to Congress. These convey the impression that the country is at peace within and without and, not wishing to doubt this statement, we considered that we were offering the Government a splendid opportunity to inaugurate a period of general reconciliation and to do away, once and for all, with any menace of armed revolt. It was with this idea in mind that we drew up and despatched our wireless asking for the release of the political prisoners. Surely no occasion could be more appropriate for such a step to be taken than the celebrations being held in honor of the great Liberator.

If, on the other hand, we are to accept the facts given in your letter we are faced with a serious dilemma. Should or should not the committees believe the statements made by the national press, the friends of the administration, of you, yourself, in your capacity as President, regarding the complete, stable and beneficent peace that reigns in Venezuela ? You will certainly say that we must accept statements coming from such highly qualified sources. Such a peace, if it is really a firmly established one, not the peace one finds in a graveyard but such as exists in a properly organised state, is indicated not only in material prosperity but also by the firmly established constitutional liberties of the citizens of that nation, by the safety of their property, by the liberty of the Press, by the exercise of universal franchise, the prerogatives of which when exercised without constraint constitute the firmest bulwark

for any constitutional government. How does it happen therefore, M. President, that you find yourself obliged to continue to employ those repressive measures and to refuse the Committee the release of a number of your compatriots, the grounds for whose detention would not satisfy a savage potentate in darkest Africa.

If, on the contrary, the situation in Venezuela is not and has not been normal, as M. President now leads us to believe, although this is contradictory to his previous statements when he declares that « we (who are *we* ?) will never depart from that line of conduct which we have followed up till now, until the policy of watchful, which we have employed in repressing anarchistic tendencies and in punishing brutal acts of armed rebellion, will no longer be an absolute necessity in order to insure the well being of the state. » Such being the case we confess that, although surprised by the statements published by your newspapers and those which you have made yourself, we consider that our action was, nevertheless, justified on purely humanitarian grounds.

Naturally it was most praiseworthy of you to thus seek as you put it « to insure the well being of the state » but were it not for our incompetence in estimating conditions in Venezuela at their just value, we should be tempted to point out that those anarchistic tendencies you refer to would disappear all the more readily in a state which strictly observed the clauses of its Constitution, which respects the liberties of action and speech of its citizens, and enforces those laws which form the base of the political education of all nations, and that freedom without which a true Republic cannot exist, and deprived of which a genuine Democracy is only an empty dream. But such considerations are outside the scope of the

interests we seek to serve and which are those involved in the freeing of the political prisoners in accordance with the just claims of free men everywhere, enlightened public opinion and the state of culture enjoyed by your brother nations. Let us therefore limit ourselves solely to the discussion of this one point.

We refuse to believe that it is by any deliberate spirit of cruelty or unfairness, but merely through oversight, that these unhappy men have been confined in unhealthy cells for indefinite periods of time. And we propose, M. President, in order to refute the indictment brought against you before the bar of international public opinion, charging you with cruelty in the manner in which the prisoners are treated, means of vindicating the good-faith of your own government and of revealing the true state of affairs to those multitudes everywhere who have become interested in the matter. This is the course we suggest. That you allow the Committees to send to Venezuela a Mixed Commission made up of two representatives from the United States, two representatives of South America and two representatives of Central America who will examine the conditions of the prisoners on the spot, see where these men are confined, investigate the treatment they receive and their physical condition, in short look into all the points at issue, and at the same time examine the records of their trials, note the charges brought against them, and whether or not they have had the opportunity of presenting their defense, as is the case in every civilized country. We trust, M. President, that you will take advantage of this offer we are making you and which, if the results are favorable, will allow you to refute your accusers and, if the results are otherwise, will enable you to take the

proper steps to remedy matters which every government desires to see set right, since they concern questions of right and justice above any mere man-made laws.

We ask you to believe, M. President, that in making you this offer we do so simply because we feel we could not abandon our task of liberating the political prisoners without jeopardising both our moral sense and that deep seated impulse which causes us to desire to bring men into an ever closer and more comprehensive unity, a unity which at the same time will insure a better mutual understanding and more amicable social and political relationship between different countries.

Cruelty is a form of moral weakness which dries up the fountainhead of human benevolence. Generosity, that quality of truly noble minds, brings about a communion of hearts which tends to make for universal harmony.

Quoting the words of General Bliss of the American Army in his letter to President Wilson written on April 19, 1919, we may say: One has not the right to commit an injustice even to insure peace. One should hope that peace may come but also remember that there are some things that are more desirable still, namely Justice and Liberty. » All nations now thirst for that Peace founded on Liberty and Justice which was the Peace achieved by Simon Bolivar and the other heroes of the struggle for independence. Bring about that peace, M. President. You will see the moral atmosphere about you grow purer while at the same time the nation's riches increase and its commerce and industry develop in all directions. This will take place that is not to one single impulse such as that of Porfirio Diaz in Mexico which was followed by a violent reaction, but as a

result of the harmonious cooperation of all the best elements in the nation's activities which will have been reassured as to the future by the reestablishment of those normal, legal and constitutional guarantees indispensable in assuring that social and political equilibrium which you, M. President, as head of the state must ardently desire to see realized. Consider, M. President how greatly your prestige will increase at home and abroad if you accept our proposal, remember that Peace is the logical consequence of Justice and Liberty without which it cannot exist, that it is upon that moral standard that depends the happiness of all people who are not sunk into the vilest depths of abjection, and that we offer you a chance to establish that Peace by performing a simple act of common humanity, the freeing of those political prisoners, which we again beseech you to do without delay. »

\* \* \*

The silence of death was the only echo this appeal aroused.

It was then that I set about writing a synthesis of my memories of these three years of horror. My documents are all about me in flesh and blood. As the harsh maxim of the Germans puts it « write with blood and you will learn that only in blood can one write the truth. » This was how I reestablished the details of the long tragedy that had been enacted at La Rotonde, a tragedy which some writers of the opposition who possess neither scruples nor professional honor have sought to copy from my notes either palliating them or, on the contrary, trying to heighten their effect by adding grotesque and impossible details rather than being satisfied with the horror of the naked truth itself.

They acted in this way in order to create a sensation. But it was not necessary. « The Shame of America » ? Just that, for it is the shame of the entire Continent which looked on, accepted and did not protest against the shame of Venezuela, the shame of that degenerate nation which allowed such things to take place. The shame of America, which has lasted for more than thirty years.

I work day and night. The sheets of paper I write on are tiny. I slip them out in the shape of cigarettes. While I am finishing the last ones the first are already being copied.

Two students, Zuniga Cisneros and Pulido Mendez will leave for New-York taking the manuscript with them.

I suggested two titles to my fellow prisoners. « Between the hoofs of the Pachyderm » or « The Shame of America ». We consider that the latter is the best. The narrative is signed ». A former prisoner. » I have tried to disguise my style for my life, or rather what life still lies ahead of me, is at stake. The history of Venezuela owes these pages to the prison warden Macedonio Guerrero who was assassinated in 1923 at the same time as Vivas and Meza, and who heroically succeeded in smuggling them out of La Rotonde.

Steps have already been taken to have the story published abroad. One day I hear that it is in circulation in New-York. Now whatever happens my comrades have been revenged. Even if the « Memoirs » of which these notes form only a part should disappear in this sink of iniquity at least the truth has been published, not in the form of vague, anonymous charges but with each name backed by a tomb. As for those who survive their lives and future behavior will confirm my statements.

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## APPENDICE I

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### LETTER FROM GENERAL JOSE VASCONCELOS REGARDING «THE TYRANT OF VENEZUELA»

*My comrades, the revolutionary party of Venezuela, offer the world in these pages the sad story of our pathetic fate. For the last twenty years Venezuela, the cradle of South American Liberty, has suffered the martyrdom of being the prey of one of the vilest, cruellest dictators that ever existed. For the last twenty years the civilized world has with indifference and apathy witnessed this destruction of a nation. But this was not the worst. Hirelings, ready to sell their pens to the highest bidder, have brazenly sought to deceive public opinion by talking about progress, the improvements of the roads and agricultural condition. They sought to imply that a nation left to its own resources was incapable of improving either its roads or its agricultural conditions. Thus protected on the one hand by indifference, on the other by self-interest the creature who has gripped the country in his evil jaws, as well as his suit of servile henchmen, who are not satisfied with exploiting the land for their own profit, must needs seek to make themselves famous and deceive posterity. But in saying this I am going too far. All one has to do is to look at a picture of one of these dictators whether his name be Calles or Gomez in order to realize that, do what they may, no one*

in years to come will give them a thought. I can remember how heartily we laughed some years ago for instance when we happened to come across a certain official portrait of the cow-herd of Maracay standing by a massive table on which reposed his silk hat, dressed in a cut-away coat and gripping his cane as though it were a stick to beat cattle with.

It is the fashion nowadays in our part of America to protest loudly against the Imperialism of the Yankees. Let us not forget however that in remaining under the heel of our local dictators we are admirably serving the schemes of conquest of our Northern neighbors. A liberalism which has run to seed ; a pseudo bolchevism which shuts its eyes to any crime as long as the criminal is powerful ; a commercial morality which under the label of economic conquests really is intended only to fill the pockets of the extremists of either party ; confusion and cowardice on every hand, here are some of the trumps that our enemies hold against us. It is useless to talk about dangers from abroad which we cannot ward off while at the same time we consent to, or at least accept, all those misdeeds at home which we could and should seek to prevent or punish. It is natural that on such a soil should spring up those « Gomezes » which today dishonor several countries of Spanish America.

All that those mob leaders can do, who in Mexico lead crowds to howl outside the Yankee Consulate provided that the native despot has allowed them to do so, is simply like barking at the moon. And the same is true of those who gather together to denounce the sufferings of Venezuela but who do not say a word about the massacres that have taken place in their own country.

It is the liberal press of all Latin nations which must share the responsibilities of that conspiracy of silence which has been enforced in recent years towards Mexico and Venezuela. More than that the Liberals abroad

have agreed to condemn the atrocities committed in Venezuela and not mention those in Mexico, just as the Clericals condemn what has happened in Mexico but say nothing about Venezuela. Thus it is clear in both cases that the grounds for protest are not a love of Liberty, nor a thirst for Justice, but merely a partisan spirit which makes the land an easy prey for the monster of Imperialism which battens on our flesh and blood.

I believe in Revolutions and I will continue to believe in Revolutions as long as circumstances may make them necessary. Not that they may be means for replacing one clique of politicians by a rival clan but because the Spirit of Revolution is the spirit of Purification. And, because I believe in the inherent virtue of Revolution. I am in favor of a Revolution in Venezuela and I should be deeply honored if I might be allowed to take even the most modest part in such an uprising. This is why in connection with this pathetic volume by Jose-Rafael Pocaterra I wish my friends to know that I am not deaf to their appeal. I respond to the call to arms. I do not feel the misfortunes of Venezuela as might the man of another race or country, I feel them as a Spanish-American I feel them as a Mexican, for in my country the example of the methods employed by Juan Vicente Gomez has begun to bear fruit. Not Mexico alone but all America is likely to become « Gomezised » unless we can stamp out and extinguish the coals of iniquity in Venezuela and in Mexico.

Let us once more formulate this solemn statement. It is the spirit of cannibalism that breaks up isolated countries into separate and hostile tribes. But when applied to countries which are in contact with powerful and well organised nations this same spirit makes them fall easy victims to attacks from without. It was the murderous policy adopted by the government of the Aztecs as one of the laws of the State which allowed the Spaniards to

*overcome them. If we do not now, at once, punish those who have slain our brothers and our liberties Northern armies will speedily be marching through our territory « to re-establish order » — as they say, but as a matter of fact merely to occupy our land and despoil the wretched inhabitants. And the world will stand by and applaud such a course of events unless we hasten to punish the tyrant as the only means of ending his murderous reign.*

Jose VASCONCELOS.

## APPENDICE II

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### LETTER TO THE TYRANT OF VENEZUELA

*Paris July 24, 1928.*

GENERAL JUAN VINCENTE GOMEZ,  
DEAR SIR,

*Six years ago, when, having violated the very base of our Constitution, you imposed a dynastic form of government on Venezuela I protested against such a political outrage. At that time I warned you that the period of our national history which was being ushered in under such auspices seemed full of ill omen. Subsequent events as well as your own attitude and behavior unfortunately proved that I was right. How tragic and revolting has been the spectacle of scandals and violence which the people of Venezuela have been obliged to witness in these last six years.*

*The people have witnessed the hideous and shameful fall of the dynasty you sought to erect. A fall which began with dagger thrusts delivered in the private rooms of your brother the Vice-President and which continued till recently your suspicions caused you to exile and desitute from office the son you had trained up as your logical successor.*

*The people have witnessed the yearly « reform » of the Constitution, amended in whatever way pleased your la-*

test him and which either bolstered up your tottering power, reduced the independence of the separate states, or disposed of the national resources in such a way as would prove profitable to your private fortune at the expense of the liberties, the property rights or the personal dignity of the Venezuelans.

The people witnessed the Government selling oil rights for the exclusive benefit of you and a few of your henchmen, for whom you dissipated the common wealth and made the country into a foreign concession. Insatiably greedy for gold you sold to the highest bidder the last remnants of what remained of our national resources. And what profit did the country get in return for its fortune in oil? What public works were carried out? What was done on behalf of Public Education, Hygiene, Commerce and Industry, to increase production, to attract migration? Nothing, absolutely nothing.

The people witnessed the way in which, having piled up in the Bank of the Treasury Department one hundred and twenty million bolivars which should have been spent to improve the material and moral conditions of those who paid them in, you obliged the Nation to buy your private estates at le Caura, the property at Paraiso, the Hotel Miramar which were sold for twenty times their original cost.

The people witnessed the Minister of Public Works spend the greater part of his funds and his activity in building palaces, laying out pleasure gardens of facilitating real estate edals for your hangers-on and your courtiers.

The people witnessed the tyrant installing himself ever more securely in power. They fell themselves enslaved more and more by his host of spies, armed hirings and gaolers, set to work on the roads, that abominable form of slavery which formed the subject of the dictator's loudest boastings. The people saw

their signature being forged to absurd adulations, their earnings confiscated and the nation deprived of every sort of constitutional guarantee and of all that made life worth living.

Lastly the people witnessed the sight of the brutal and unjustified attack on the young students of the University of Caracas merely because during their innocent celebrations of *Floral Games* they had dared sing the praises of that Goddess whom they loved but had never seen—*Fair Liberty*. It was then that the indignation of the masses burst out throughout the length and breadth of the Republic. Today you hear it muttering in your ears «How long»? How long will you dare take advantage of your superior strength? How long will you oppress us? How long will you ruin us? How long will you shame us before all the world?

Sir, the cup is overflowing. The people of Venezuela have risen to their feet. They are resolved that their long shame shall end here and now. The spark of the youthful enthusiasm of the students has fired the nation. It has lighted the torch of hatred which shall consume the despot, it has kindled the clear flame of civic courage, it has already provoked acts of collective heroism which are unique in the annals of our Continent.

«Oh Alma Mater, Holy University, thou the eternally persecuted victim of those tyrants who tremble and shut their eyes blinded by the blazing, glory of the torch which you pass on from one generation of students to another. Oh noble Womanhood of Venezuela. Oh Young Men, oh People of Caracas! After the night that has enveloped your land for a quarter of a century it owes its awakening to your enthusiasm.»

In the latest constitutional amendment which was passed a little over a month ago and by which you assure yourselves further advantages in your struggle against the defenseless populace it is easy to see that you intend

*to defy practically the entire mass of public opinion and to usurp the reigns of office for another seven years.*

*Confronted with such a crises the danger is very great. For there can be no question but what the continuation of your administration, either by you personally or by some figure head, will be the signal for mass insurrections and the outbreak of a civil war with all the horrors that this involves.*

*It is for this reason, General, that I, on behalf of my compatriots and because you have muzzled the press, while persecuting more and more harshly all expression of independent opinion, take this opportunity to inform you that my country insists you give your solemn promise that you will not remain in office after April 19, 1929, and that as guarantee of the execution of this promise the nations demands that you dissolve the present Congress and immediately hold free and untrammelled elections for the Sovereign Congress which shall appoint a President of the Republic. For once, General, commit an arbitrary act which shall be for the country's good.*

*Yes, you must retire, without hesitation or reserves. After twenty years of power which have produced nothing worthwhile fortune gives you this opportunity of doing something for Venezuela. Take advantage of that chance, General.*

Your fellow-countryman,  
SANTO A. DOMINICI.

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